

**Crossing Borders: The Case of Ethnic Dagestani in Georgia**

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## **Abstract**

According to William Zartman “Borders run across land but through people. On maps they appear as fine one-dimensional lines, whereas on the ground they have many dimensions. Borders are boundaries in depth, space around a line, place where state meets society” (Zartman 2010:16). It is impossible to understand borders, without peripheral relations between the states and societies they contain. Itself borders are zones in which people create special relationship with other people. In this thesis, I plan to write about the case of a small minority group located on the periphery in Georgia in order to understand how minorities find a place in an ethnically diverse and rapidly changing society. Their responses to changing central policies and border conditions provide an ideal opportunity to see how elements of the population not only respond to, but also actively constitute, the conditions of a border regime and sovereignty.

Georgia is a state with a highly diverse population, and boundary conditions are everywhere in the society. In addition, the country has complex borders with neighboring countries such as Russia, where population groups are distributed across boundaries and have a long history of coping with border conditions. Borderlands are “zones of varying widths, in which people have recognizable configurations of relationships to people inside the zone, on both sides of the borderline but within the cultural landscape of the borderlands, and, as people of the border, special relationships with other people and institutions in their respective nation and state” (Donnan and Wilson 1994:8).

The post-independence period has been one of rapid change, which makes it possible to observe the ways that sovereignty is formed in local contexts, and the role of elements of the population in relations between the state and the population.

In case of the form of comparative analysis of the state border political changes, in this thesis I will show socio-cultural and economic changes of ethnic minority in Georgia. I will show how borders affect the groups living near them.

## Reading Guidelines for Chapters

The Anthropology of borders mainly developed from 1990's. "As scholars have sought to grasp the changed configuration of borders brought about by the fall of the iron curtain, the enlargement of the European Union (EU), the (re)emergence of ethni-nationalisms, the securitization of migration, and the proliferation of new technologies and techniques for policing trans-border movements" (Reeves 2014:6-7). According to Donnan (2001) it focuses on three main dimensions of border: cultural, social and territorial. In this thesis I will touch all three dimensions of borders. There are different cultural diversities which makes borders and social separation between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians. For example, different religions (on the one hand Muslim society, on the other hand Christian society (see chapter three), language (Avar and Georgian), and history; Fredrik Barth argues that "this history has produced a world of separate people, each with their culture and each organized in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island to itself" (Barth 1969:11). In my view, based on my ethnographic data material, cultural diversities such as history and language not only separate ethnic groups and create boundaries, but also make boundaries crossable. During my fieldwork I heard many life histories which underline good historical relationship between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians (see chapter four). The kinship tradition in the Caucasus called *Konagoba*, which I will discuss in chapter four, is an example of such a historical relationship between ethnic Avar and ethnic Georgian; the *Konag* (friend who is hosting particular person and vice versa ) institute is sacred for Caucasians.

In first chapter, at first I will give an ethnographic overview of Dagestan. Then I will show the history of Avar villages in Georgia before the Soviet Union, during Soviet Union, in 1990's and in contemporary Georgia. Then I will focus on the period of Soviet Union, and how Stalin's policies of forced population transfers affected Avars in Georgia. In 1944 Stalin forced Avars to settle from Georgia in Chechnya; in 1956 Avars returned from Chechnya to Georgia. Finally, in first chapter I will discuss the methodology I was using during my six-month fieldwork among Avars in Georgia, and how I was first entering the field.

My field site is near an international territorial border marked by high mountains, which separates Georgia from Dagestan in the Russian Federation. In chapter two, I will show the changing border politics in three different time periods: 1) during the Soviet Union; 2) during the 1990's; and 3) in contemporary independent nation-state of Georgia.

In chapter three I will focus on socio- cultural changes as a consequence of the opening the border between Georgia and Russia in 2010. Describing Avars' everyday activities and rituals, such as cutting down vineyards, building a new mosque, changing wedding ceremonies. I will discuss a villagers' new concern with being a "good Muslim". Also, I will compare my ethnographic data material, which was collected in 2008, 2009 (when the border between Georgia and Russia was closed) in the village Tsodna, with my ethnographic data material which was collected in 2013. This comparison gives me reason to suggest that the concern with being a "good Muslim" is connected with an increasing number of religious people (mostly young generation) in the village; which itself is connected with the opening of the state border<sup>1</sup> between Georgia and Russia. In last section of chapter three I will focus on the conflict between villagers of Tsodna and Vake. In chapter four I will discuss about economic and kin-relationship between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgian, which shows opposite 'picture' then the chapter before.

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<sup>1</sup> It was officially opened in 2010

## Introduction

My research focused on the people who moved from Daghestan to Georgia and settled in the Kvareli region in periphery of Georgia. Georgian ethnographer N. Omarashvili points out that Daghestanis settled in the Kvareli region of Georgia in the XVIII-XIX century and built three villages: Tivi, Tebeljokhi and Khashalkhuti (2008). Nowadays there are three Daghestan villages in the Kvareli region: Tsodna, Chalaubani and Sopeli. The neighbouring villages of Avar villages in the Kvareli region are settled by ethnic Georgians, who have been living in three villages: Vera, Gachedili – ethnic Orthodox Georgians, and Vake - ethnic Georgian Muslims. These settlers may be considered eco-migrants from the southern Georgian region of Adjara , because of a natural disaster there in the 1980s. Daghestani people living in Georgia are part of the largest ethnic group in Daghestan, called “Avar”. This is an English language version of the Russian ethnonym “Avartsy” (see Weekes, 1978: 175). The Georgian scholar Roland Topchishvili points out that their endoethnonym is “Maarulal”, but in Georgian historical sources they are referred to as “Khundzebi” (2007). In everyday contemporary speech, however, Georgians are referring to the origin of the Daghestani people as either “Avarebi” or “Daghestnelebi”. Daghestani themselves living in Georgia are using both names “Maharulal” and “Avar” to refer to and explain their ethnicity. In this thesis, I will use both “Avar” as “Dagestan” terms, which has an established usage in Russian and English academic literature when discussing Daghestani people living in Georgia whether they are Georgian or Russian citizens.

The Kvareli region is situated in the Georgian-Russian borderlands towards Daghestan in the Caucasus, just south of the Caucasus mountain range. The aim of my research was to investigate everyday life among the Avars living in Georgia and as Zartman (2010) argues continually changing social processes; “Borderlands need to be understood, not places or even events, but as social processes... they are continually in movement, both fast and slow, and any static depiction of the moment contains within in the elements of change” (Zartman 2010: 17). This thesis proposes to look at borders as processes (not only as lines on the map) and asks a number of questions. I was interested in the relationship between different ethnic groups, how it reflects the sovereignty and the status of the various ethnically and nationally defined populations. Some key questions I sought to answer were: How were people affected by political changes in the region?



How do people become agents and creators of new relationships; how do individuals find ‘paths’ which make borders crossable?

In order to answer these questions I observed activities and rituals such as marriages, and burials and not least the *Konag* which is a key form of institutionalized hospitality between people from different ethnicity and religious practices among Avars in one of the villages I studied.

## Chapter One

### Historical Background and setting for the fieldwork

*“All borders have histories, and these histories affect current realities of border regions and the states they bound”. (Diener&Hagen 2010:11)*

#### Ethnographic overview of Daghestan

Daghestan is located in the North Caucasus region, bordering Georgia in the northeast. The geographical border between Dagestan and Georgia is the Caucasus Mountains. Since 1921 Daghestan is in the Russian Federation. Dagestan is an ethnically diverse federation, which comprise 33 separate ethnic groups.

*“Since earliest recorded times, the Caucasus has been famous for its extreme cultural pluralism- and its violence- brought about by successive waves of foreign intervention: Greek, Roman, Arab, Turk, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman, and Russian. Since the time of the Arab conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the region has been predominantly Muslim but not exclusively so and neither does Islam define a religious continuum: Armenia and Georgia are largely Christian; Azerbaijan is mainly Shi’I; and Dagestan has the region’s largest Sufi communities” (Grant 2005:39).*

The Dagestani people living in Georgia are part of the largest ethnic group in Daghestan, called “Avar”. The Georgian ethnographer Ketevan Khutsishvili points out that their endoethnonym is “Maarulal”, but in Georgian historical sources they are referred to as “Khundzebi” (2006). In everyday contemporary speech, however, Georgians are referring to the origin of the Daghestan people as either “Leki”, “Avar” or “Dagestnelebi”. Dagestani themselves, living in Georgia, are using the names “Maharulal” [which means in Avar language “Mountaineers”] “Leki” and “Avar” to refer to and explain their ethnicity.

Avar language belongs to the Ibero-Caucasian language family’s Nakh- Dagestanian group and its sub-group of the Khundzib- Andian –Dodoian languages. The Avar language consists of different dialects. “Literary Avar Language was based on language ‘Bolmats’ (“Guests

Language”) which was produced in bazaars during the centuries” (Topchishvili 2007:154). “The Avar alphabet was created in XV-XVI centuries, and it was based on Arabic script so called \_ Ajami” (Topchishvili 2007:154). Georgian and Dagestani linguists thought that before the arrival of Arabs in Dagestan Avars were using the Georgian alphabet. “In 1928 the Avar alphabet was changed into Latin, and again in 1938 into Russian [Cyrillic]” (Topchishvili 2007:154). According to Roland Topchishvili (2007) Avars are spread over several regions and countries: In Chechnya, Ingushetia, the Kalmyk Republic and Dagestan (particularly centered in its capital Makhachkala) all in The Russian Federation, in Azerbaijan and in Turkey.

A small group of Dagestani (Avars) lives in Georgia in the Kvareli region. According to the Georgian General Population Census of 2002 there are 1996 ethnic Avars living in Georgia (Sakhalkho Damtsveli, Etnosebi SaqarTveloshi: 2008). They are settled in three villages: Tsodna, Chalaubani and Sofeli. Georgian scholars suggest that the relationship between Georgians and Dagestanis (Avars) has a long history which is connected with cattle-breeding<sup>2</sup> (Omarashvili 2008) (Niko Khutsishvili 2006). Also it is a well-known fact that in 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries the relationship with Georgia and Dagestan was difficult. During the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the historical period referred to by Georgian historians as “Lekianoba”<sup>3</sup> Dagestanis were conducting raids into Georgia, mostly in Kvareli region. According to the French writer’s Ana Dranse<sup>4</sup> (Dranse 1978) in 1854 Dagestanis led by Imam Shamil<sup>5</sup> destroyed town Kvareli: burnt down buildings, ransacked homes and took prisoners<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Dagestani were using winter fields for cattle in Georgia, because of cold weather in Dagestan and Georgians were using summer fields for cattle in Dagestan, because of hot summer.

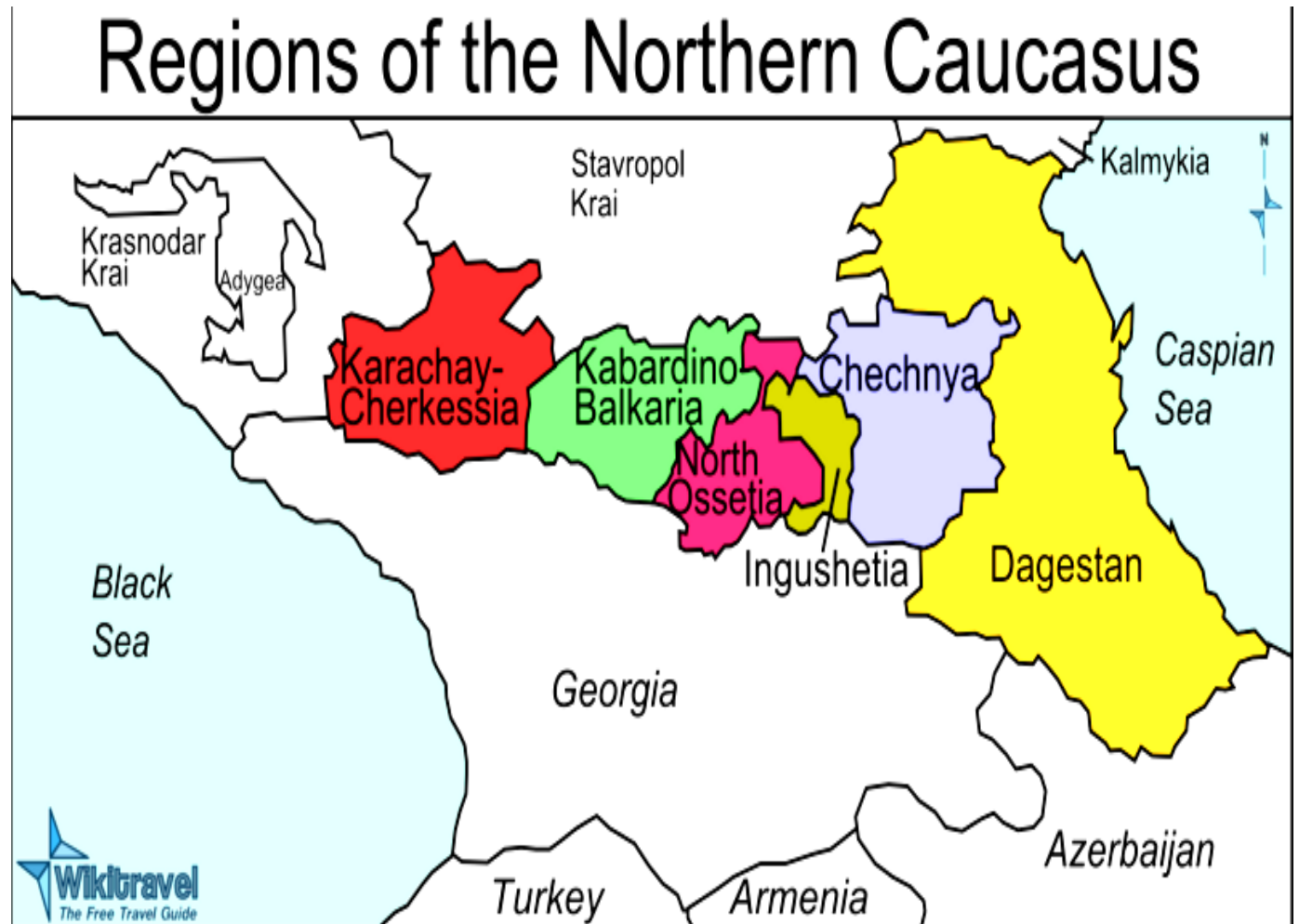
<sup>3</sup> “Lekianoba” \_ Georgian historians call the historical period (17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries) “Lekianoba”, which explain the time when Dagestanis were conducting raids into Georgia. Itself term “Leki” in Georgian language explains all ethnic Dagestanis; It is well known fact among the Georgian scholars that term “Leki” was taken from the small ethnic group Laki, which are living in Dagestan.

<sup>4</sup> Ana Dranse was the teaching French language to the Georgian nobleman. She was kidnapped by the Dagestanis when they destroyed town Kvareli. After several months she was free. When she went in Fence she wrote the book “Shamil’s prisoner women”.

<sup>5</sup> Imam Shamil (1797-1871) was an ethnic Avar, he was the third leader of the Caucasian Imamate from 1834. Shamil was religious and political commander of the Muslim society in north Caucasus. He united Muslims (first western Dagestan, then Chechnia and Cherkes) in theocratic state of North Caucasus. He was the leader of the Caucasian War which was between Russia and North Caucasian people (Dagestanis, Chechens, Cherkes)

<sup>6</sup> See also Bruce Grant. 2005. *The Good Russian Prisoner: Naturalizing Violence in the Caucasus Mountains*

After that incident Georgian and Russian soldiers started building a physical border between Georgia and Dagestan<sup>7</sup>, the so-called “Caucasian Wall”.



Sources: [http://wikitravel.org/shared/File:Northern\\_Caucasus\\_regions\\_map.png](http://wikitravel.org/shared/File:Northern_Caucasus_regions_map.png)

<sup>7</sup> At this time Dagestan was part of the theocratic state of North Caucasus.

## History of Dagestani (Avar) villages in Georgia

From 19<sup>th</sup> century until now (2014) the demography and location of Avar villages was changed. Villages were changing a geographical places; the reason was the political and economic situation. Nowadays there are three Daghestani villages in the Kvareli region: Tsodna, Chalaubani and Sopeli. Neighbouring villages are: Vera, Vake, Gachedili<sup>8</sup>.

There is a lack of literature about cultural practices and socio-cultural changes among Avars in Georgia. Although, there are several ethnographic and historical books about Avars living in Georgia, they do not deal with social-cultural changes. The most useful book about Avars living in Georgia is written by the Georgian ethnographer Nana Omarashvili in 2008; the book reflects the ethnography of Avar people until 1990s. Nana Omarashvili outlines some traditions of Avar people such as marriage and burial. I will use the book as a historical-ethnographical source. It will be helpful for me to compare old traditions with traditions as they are practised and presented nowadays. I will compare on the one hand information which is written in the book (Omarashvili 2008), and on the other hand my own ethnographic data material which I collected during my six month fieldwork in the Avar village Tsodna in 2013.

The Georgian ethnographer Omarashvili points out that Daghestanis settled in the Kvareli region of Georgia in 19<sup>th</sup> century and built three villages: Tsodna, Jokh and Khashalkhuti (2008). As my informants told me, before 1944 the villages of Tsodna and Tebeljokh were not two separate villages but one village called Tsodna-Jokhi. However in 1957 when Avars returned from Chechnya (in 1944 Stalin had resettled Avars from Georgia in Chechnya; see next section) they established a new village near the old place of village Tsodna-Tebeljokh, and it was called village Tsodna.

As Omarashvili (2008:85) mentions the reason Avar sheep-breeders originally settled<sup>9</sup> in the Kvareli region was the advantageous winter pastures. So, Avar sheep-breeders spent the winter

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<sup>8</sup> In the villages Vera, Vake, Gachedili are living ethnic Georgians. In the village Vake are living ethnic Georgian muslims, who are eco-migrants, because of natural disaster from the Southern Georgia region of Adjara in 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> Historians did not know particular time when Avars settled in Kvareli region. Most of them are thinking that a first Dagestani dwelling was founded in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. During my fieldwork my informants who were under 70-80 years old, also did not know exactly when their ancestor came in Georgia. They say that their

in the Kvareli region, and, spring, summer and autumn in Dagestan. Over time small Avar dwellings were built in this region of Georgia. 87 year old Suleiman from the village Tsodna told me: *“I was born here. I do not remember when Avars first settled here, but I know that my great-grandfather lived here.”* 79 year old Maga told me: *“In ancient times there were not our<sup>10</sup> graves. Our ancestors’ graves were in a place where there is now the village of Vera<sup>11</sup>. So, our ancestor lived there before. I do not know exactly when we came here, but I know that my great-grandfather’s grave is here in this village. I was born in 1935, and from that time on the government had started recording people in the places where they live.”*

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Avars were living (until 1944) not only in villages Tsodna, Jokhi and Khashalkhuti but also in other villages where ethnic Georgians<sup>12</sup> lived and continued to live after 1944; in the village Vera there were five Dagestani families, in the city of Kvareli there were nineteen families, in the village of Chikaani \_ one family, and in Qoriani village there were \_four Avars family (Omarashvili 2008).

During my fieldwork with archival material books from the Soviet Union Administrative Division in 1925, 1930, 1949, I found that Avar villages were already fixed in Soviet General Population Census as ethnicity labels.

According to the Soviet Union Administrative division in 1925 in the village Tsodna there were 171 household which included 661 ethnic Avars<sup>13</sup>, in the village Chalaubani there were 23 households with 88 Avars ; in 1930 in village Tsodna there were 115 households, with 438 Avars ; in village Jokhi there were 54 households, and 256 persons [all Avars]. Also I found information about some ethnically mixed villages, villages which exist today, but have become mono-ethnic with only ethnic Georgians living there. For example in the Soviet Union Administrative Division for 1930 is written that in village Satskhenisi there were 22 households with 97 persons, and from these persons 51 were ethnic Georgians, 40 were ethnic Russians, 2 were ethnic Avars and 4 were “Others” (Most likely “others”, as suggested by one villager,

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grandfather’s father was buried in Kvareli region, but they did not know the exact place of the graves. Comparing historical and ethnographic data material, I think that first Dagestani dwellings in Kvareli region were founded in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>10</sup> Avars

<sup>11</sup> This is a neighboring village where ethnic Georgian live.

<sup>12</sup> Christians

<sup>13</sup> They are not using term ‘ethnic’ or ‘Avar’; they use \_ ‘Soul’ and ‘Leki’

referred to ethnic Poles who worked as border-guards on the border between Georgia and Dagestan in 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century. There were also several gravestones in this village with Polish names.) In village Vera in 1930 there were 1105 households with 4917 people, of that number of people 4603 were ethnic Georgian, 190 were ethnic Armenians, 12 were ethnic Ossetians, 21 were ethnic Russians, 24 were ethnic Avars and 67 were “Others” [ in this case I do not know who “Others” might refer to]. There was no mention of any Avar villages or ethnic Avars in the Soviet Union Administrative Division for 1949. The reason for this is Stalin’s resettlement of Avars from Georgia to Chechnya in 1944 (see next section).

### **Repatriates and new villages**

From 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1990 Avar villages in Georgia changed not only in terms of their demographics, ethnic and physical characteristics but also in terms of their social and economic characteristics which shaped the everyday lives of its inhabitants. This is mainly a result of macro political changes: First in 1944, during the Soviet Union and Stalin’s forced population resettlements and, second, during the “restructuring or “perestroika” period on the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1944, Stalin forced Avars from the three villages Tivi, Tebeljokhi and Khashalkhuti to settle in Chechnya near the city of Grozny (while Chechen and Ingush people from Georgia were exiled to Central Asia and Siberia). This was a part of Stalin’s crackdown on minorities in historically restive regions of the Soviet empire. After Avars had been expelled from Georgia, ethnic Georgians settled in their abandoned villages Tebeljokhi and Khashalkhuti and changed the names of the villages’ into Chikaani and Mtisdziri. The Avar village Tsodna was looted and destroyed<sup>14</sup> by ethnic Georgians. In 1955-1956 Chechens and Ingush returned to Chechnya from Central Asia and Siberia, and Avars who were deported from Georgia to Chechnya by Stalin in 1944, returned to their villages in Georgia. In 1958-1959 two Avar villages were built and a third village, Tsodna, was rebuilt in the Kvareli region. In 1970 Avars built a fourth village which they called Thilistskaro. So, in 1970 -1990, there were four Avar villages in Georgia: Tsodna, Tkhilistskaro, Sopeli and Chalaubani. In 1990 the political situation in Georgia pushed Avars to leave Georgia, and many Avars left their villages in Georgia; village Tkhilistskaro was completely deserted. According to (Suny 1999/2000:163)in 1990 “ *Abkhaz, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian minorities within Georgia were depicted in*

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<sup>14</sup> Demolished

*the rhetoric of the nationalist leader and first president of independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, either as guests of the Georgians or agents of Soviet power. Elected overwhelmingly in 1990, Gamsakhurdia's increasing authoritarianism quickly alienated not only the non-Georgians, but influential members of the nationalist movement who rose up against him in the fall of 1991, drove him from Tbilisi, and invited Eduard Shevardnadze to return to Georgia early in 1992".* So since 1990 only three Avar villages exist in the Kvareli region.

During my fieldwork I collected some life histories and I found that some of the Avar families returned from Chechnya not in 1957, but in 1945-1946<sup>15</sup>. I am going to recount and analyse two different stories about Avars' resettlement in Chechnya by Stalin in 1944. The first is the life history of my Avar informant who was living in Chechnya from 1944 until 1957, the second story concerns some Avar families who were resettled in Chechnya in 1944, but returned to Georgia and the Kvareli region after just a few months. This early return of some families is surprising and has not earlier been documented. I will start with the first story.

My informant Suleiman is 82 years old. He is living alone in village Tsodna. His wife died two years ago, his sons are living in Dagestan and as he told me are coming home to visit only in the summer. I chose this particular person because he is one of the oldest men in the village Tsodna. He was 12 years old when he and his family were exiled in Chechnya. His story illustrates the period of Soviet Union and repression of the Avars in Chechnya. It is illustrative how Avars from village Tsodna from the Georgian side of the border became inhabitants of the other Chechnya side of the border. Suleiman, who spent his childhood from 1944-1957 in Chechnya told me:

*"In 1944 we were deported to Chechnya. Then came Khrushchev's order, which allowed Chechens to return from Kazakhstan to Chechnya. A lot of people [Chechens] came. We became obligated to give up the houses in Chechnya. The government told us (Avars and Chechens) that if we all somehow make some agreement or decide to stay in Chechnya, then we can stay there; but they were robbers and we decided to return to Georgia. We came back in 1957. When we returned the government "Zapretil" [he used the Russian word, which means "forbade"] came to Georgia ... So, police did not allow us to come to Georgia, and then we started talking that our homeland is here and that our fathers and grandfathers lived here before 1944. After that they allowed us to be here in Georgia. Village was destroyed; houses were stolen... here was nothing.*

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<sup>15</sup> In 1957 Avars were officially allowed by the Soviet authorities to enter to Georgia.



*Before 1944 in Georgia there were our three villages, but when we came here there was nothing, just a piece of a land. No one helped us, neither people from Daghestan, nor the Georgian government. Some Avars brought wood from the forest and started building wooden cabins. Mostly we<sup>16</sup> spent that year in a pig farm, which was built in our village after we had left it in 1944.”*

In 1957 most of the Avar families from the village Tsodna lived in a pig farm, because of poverty and epidemics fifty-seven children died there.

The second story is about Avars who were resettled in Chechnya in 1944, but they returned to Georgia after a few months. One day I was interviewing Komeida. He is a 85 years old man from the village Tsodna. Komeida's sons are living in Dagestan. He told me they left Georgia in 1990's. I knew from my host that he was living in Chechnya only for a few months in 1944. His information is very important because it shows a relationship of loyalty and trust between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians relationships that were to change in the 1900s.

*“We were resettled in Chechnya by Stalin in 1944. Chechens were deported to Siberia , and we were settled in their homes. One day from Tlyarata District [in Daghestan, near the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan] came a man who told us that we need to leave our village and houses and go to Chechnya. He said that there was good land, and if we do not go to Chechnya then the government will resettle us in Siberia. For me it would have been better to stay here in my village and house, but... Well, here we were, why should we want to settle in Chechnya? They [the government] did not use force against us, but there was no other way for us, we did not have any choice. One day several cars came to the village and they took us to the town Tsnori [a town in Kakheti]. So we left our village and houses. We took only some clothes everything else we left here. There was carriage in Tsnori. From Tsnori we were taken to Tbilisi, from Tbilisi to Baku, and from Baku to Gudermes near Grozny. It was a very hot summer, and we were on the road for two-three days, it was terrible in carriage .When we arrived in Gudermes we were taken by car to another village (I do not remember the name of the village), from that village they took us to another village Raghita. In Raghita they showed us houses and told us to live there. I was there for two - three months , until autumn , then I went with my father, mother and sister to Botlikh region [Dagestan] and stayed in my grandfather's house. We spent all winter in Botlikh,*

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<sup>16</sup> Avar Repatriats

*but father went back to Georgia. When spring came, the apricot tree had not yet apricots<sup>17</sup>; we left Botlikh and moved through the mountains to Georgia. We were six people. First we moved from Botlikh to Andil and from Andil to Viden [Andil and Viden are places in Dagestan]. When we arrived in Georgia my mother and I went to the village Velistsikhe, from Velistsikhe we took the train to Tsnori, and from Tsnori we went to Tsiteltskaro [ in Kakheti ]. My father worked in the felt cloak shop in Tsiteltskaro. In Tsiteltskaro we stayed about five months, and then we left the village and went to the village Vera. We rented the house from a Georgian. That time it was impossible to live in our old house because the population of Balgojani [ a neighboring village to the village Tsodna] had taken our places, and we were not allowed to be in Georgia. Some time later, another Avar family had come to the village Vera, they also took houses for rent from Georgians. We made felt cloaks at home and then we sold them in the market, it was the only way at that time to survive. We had very good relationships with Georgians in Vera; one time when our family did not have food, our Georgian neighbors gave us some. I was in the village Vera until 1948, and then I went to the mountains as a shepherd. I was in the mountains one year, and then I returned to the village Vera. Then I started working as a builder in the town Kvareli. It was a part time job, so after a few months I returned to the village Vera. These people<sup>18</sup> came here in 1957 from Chechnya.”*

If there were some Avar families in Georgia during 1944 -1957, then why is there no mention of them in the Soviet Union Administrative Division for 1949? This was the time of Stalin’s repressive regime of mass surveillance, and it is surprising that these families were not reported to the authorities. People locally may have known but not reported or perhaps cases were reported but not registered? In any case this would have been a subversive act. I think this fact speaks of a relationships based on loyalty and trust between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians, relationships that were changed in 1990s, when ethnic Georgians from the neighboring villages started demonstrations against Avars<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> He used apricot tree as a marker of the season

<sup>18</sup> Those Avars who were deported in Chechnya by Stalin in 1944

<sup>19</sup> 1990s was the hard period for the ethnic minorities in Georgia. Georgian Government provoked ethnic Georgians in the discrimination of ethnic minorities.

## **Methodology and fieldwork setting**

### **Entering in Field**

I arrived in the village Tsodna for my field research in July 2013. My host was the old mullah Murad. We are connected through several years old friendship dating back from when I was an undergraduate student of ethnology and stayed several weeks in Village Tsodna for fieldwork. He has five children, four boys and one daughter called Zeinab. The boys live in Dagestan and his daughter with him. Before arriving, I had called Murad and described my aims for the fieldwork. He was very happy, and he hosted me for six months. I informed him that I will pay for rent and cover expenses for food etc. Murad and the local mullah Badrudin assisted me in finding people who became my informants. I spent the last week of my field research in the Tbilisi main library where I studied government archives and statistics about Avars living in Georgia.

### **Participant observation**

This thesis is based on my six-month ethnographic fieldwork among ethnic Avars in the village Tsodna. The dominant method which I used for the collection of ethnographic data material was participant observation with other methods like interviews. Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their lives, routines and cultures. “Participant observation involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives” (Bernard 2001:136).

After arriving in the village Tsodna, I was taking part in the daily life activities of Avars: agricultural work such as cultivation, weeding and hoeing and shepherding; life-cycle rituals such as burials and, travelling to Azerbaijan with friends from the village to observe and learn about the *Konag* institution. Participating in such kind of activities I gradually established a relationship of trust with villagers, and it also helped establish new relationships and new contacts. The first three months were the most challenging since I felt that people did not trust me. They may have thought that I was from the government or from the police. However, after

three months had passed I felt that they were more open and familiar with me, and they shared with me some of their more intimate thoughts. I was constantly being introduced to new people and developing a sense of the social networks among people. The standard of living in the village was modest and most households did not have indoor plumbing. Water had to be fetched from a communal well, which was situated up from the village. In summer some people would bathe in the river, some of them at home. In summer I was taking shower in river as most of the villagers do. The river runs between the two villages<sup>20</sup>. It is a meeting place for villagers from both villages. Madeleine Reeves, who have worked in Central Asia, talks about “particular canal [which] winds through, and thus connects, the villages of Khojai-A”lo, Üch-Döbö, and Ak-Tatyr. In so doing it also connects- and sometimes divides-two neighbouring post-Soviet states: Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”(2014:1). It turned out that the river is a meeting place for villagers from different villages, and my regular trips to the river to wash and swim became opportunities for establishing new contacts with people from the villages on both sides of the river. The river was also a place where I could observe how new relationships between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians were established. There were separate places in the river for Avar men and for women. In the winter my host installed indoor plumbing and a bathroom, which made easier to take shower.

## **Interview**

After arriving at the village Tsodna, I was conducting unstructured interviews and of course I had everyday conversations with the people. The ethnographer needs to develop social relations with informants, and learn the native language, to establish trust, get to know people and not least learn how and when to ask questions before starting an interview. According to Devereux knowledge of the native language enable richer and more textured data to be collected and generates greater opportunities to interact and join the company of others in the research community (Devereux 1994:44).

My knowledge of the languages (Avar, Russian and Georgian), and that fact, that Avars living in Georgia speak these three languages, made conversation with the local population easier and it was more fruitful for collecting ethnographic data. Moreover, the knowledge of the vernacular

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<sup>20</sup> The village Tsodna and the village Vera

languages enabled me to interact with my informants independently without the services of a research assistant.

In order to get specific information on certain issues such as the *Konag* institution, marriage and burial procedures, I arranged interviews with some of my key informants. These key informants again introduced me to and gave me access to other participants in the rituals. There was limited information about Avars living in Georgia, so one of the aims was to use the oral historical research method. Giles-Vernik (2006:85) suggests that “In places where documentary evidence is slim (such as in parts of Africa for certain historical periods), oral histories can provide insights into the past that might otherwise remain inaccessible to social scientist”. The life-histories I recorded helped me understand the ways in which people produce knowledge about, and remember the past. This again, makes it possible to understand history in the present time, what individuals believe, imagine and value.

### **Ethical Issues**

“Ethical issues in relation to ethnographic study is about building mutually beneficial relationships with people you meet in the field and about acting in a sensitive and respectful manner”(Scheyvens, Nowak 2003:139). I deem this part as the rise and fall of the entire field work. Before going to the field I was aware that Avars may see me primarily as an ethnic Georgian who represents the government. So, I was informing honestly about my background and what I was doing in the village; that I was not a Georgian government official, but rather a student from Bergen University and that for exam purposes I was writing a paper about “*Crossing Borders In Georgia*”. Also, I stressed that I was very interested in their everyday life and traditions. I took an interest in learning the norms and basic cultural values which were unfamiliar to me. I informed my informants that I would not reveal their names in any of my writing. In this thesis all names of people and villages have been anonymized. I have also left out information which I consider may be of potential damage to the well-being of my informants. My informants know that I am ready and prepared to destroy any information that any of my informants has provided me with if that person approaches me in the midst of or after the information is collected and requests that it should be withdrawn. I was treated with kindness and met with friendship, and in spite of my young age I was taken seriously and respected as a

“learned person” also by older informants. Leaving the village was a sad moment but I promised I would visit again either as researcher or as just a guest. For safety of my respondents and all people who I met on my fieldwork, I changed the names of villages and personal information of informants like names, surnames and age.

## Chapter Two

### A porous border: Crossing the Caucasian Mountains

*“Borders are political territories in the sense that they are appropriated spaces, whether by State or by society and its in-groups”.*

*(Tandia 2010:20)*

According to Donnan and Wilson (2001:3), “borders no longer function as they once did, or at least not in every respect. Globalization of culture, the internationalization of economics and politics, and the decline in Cold War superpowers’ and satellites’ hostilities have apparently resulted in the opening up of borders and the relaxation of those state controls which limited the movement of people, goods, capital and ideas.” From this point border and border politics are not static, and are changing over time. It is interesting to ask how and why do borders change (I mean changes in border regimes, i.e. how borders are policed and how hard or porous they are)? According to Radu (2010: 416) “the border is a space of ‘becoming’ in which ‘the state’ can play a role, not necessarily a central one, but one amongst many other actors”. Zartman (2010), argues, that the border is the place where state and society meets each other. In my view at the same time a particular border is not only a place where state and society meets, but also the place where the individual meets the state. There are various reasons for crossing a border by individuals. It creates different understandings of border politics between person and society, and at the same time border politics has different meanings for people; the border politics can be understood differently in state and it is much more subjective than objective. For example, ethnic Georgian(s) may be cross border between Georgia and Dagestan because he/she want to visit it as a tourist, take some photos, post it in Facebook and show his/her friends that she/he was in particular place in Dagestan; Second example, particular person ethnic Avar may cross Georgian-Dagestan border, because there would be his/her relative’s or family members funeral, or wedding and etc. State politic of border meets similarly both of persons, but effected differently \_ tourist (person who want to cross border and go somewhere in summer), and person who has relatives beyond border \_ has reasons but different alternatives. In case if state borders between particular countries is closed tourist will visit different country; in case of second example, person or society will try to find alternative ways, different paths to get beyond the

closed border and visit his/ her relatives. As Donnan and Wilson (2001:4) argues, “*changes in the structure and function of international borders whether they be world-wide or restricted to one state, reflect major changes in the strength and resilience of the nation-state, and in the variety of social, political and economic processes long through to be the sole or principal domain of the state. State borders in the world today not only mirror the changes that are effecting the institutions and policies of their states, but also point to transformations in the definitions of citizenship, sovereignty and traditional identity. Moreover, that borders are not just symbols and locations of these changes, which they most certainly are, but are often also their agents*”.

In this chapter I am going to show different actors in ‘making borders’ in different time period and how Avars find new ways and paths through Dagestan. I am going to focus three time period: first, During Soviet Union, when there was no state border between Georgia and Dagestan, and it had been relatively easy to get in Dagestan and vice versa through the Caucasus mountains. Second, during the 1990s, when Soviet Union collapsed and state borders between Georgia and Dagestan established. During that time ethnic Avars from Georgia start using third country\_ Azerbaijan to get in Dagestan and vice versa. Third time period is from 2010 until now, when borders between Georgia and Russia opened.

My aim during my six-month fieldwork was to get information how the Avars from Village Tsodna used to travel before the state border was closed. Since when did the border close? Since when did they start to use the third country for crossing the border? How long did it take to travel from Village Tsodna to Dagestan before establishing the border and how long does it take now? How does the border affect mobility of the Avars living in Georgia?

### **Without Border: Time of the Soviet Union**

In this section I am going to focus on period of the Soviet Union, when the border was open. I will focus on everyday life of the Avars and how they find ways to pass the border between Georgia and Dagestan (the Russian Federation). Based on my ethnographic data material, including life histories, I depict a picture about social life of the villagers during Soviet Union when there was no state border between Georgia and Dagestan. The life histories illustrate not



only the life of individuals and society in the past but also describe their contemporary life. Gradually since the Soviet Union border politics has changed and with it the social life of the villagers of Village Tsodna has changed too.

Georgia has complex borders with the neighboring countries such as Dagestan in the Russian Federation. The village Tsodna is situated on the Georgian-Russian borderlands towards Dagestan in the Caucasus, just to the south of the Caucasus mountain range. During my fieldwork I heard many stories as part of the life histories I recorded of how the villagers from Village Tsodna went to Dagestan by passing the Caucasus Mountains. The closest route from Village Tsodna to Dagestan was through the border of Adalai Mountain/ the Samuri River [the border did not have an official name, so the people used toponyms of Mountain Adalai or the Samur River]. I was told the Samuri River used to be the geographical border between Georgia and Dagestan, now it is in Russian territory. The nearest route from the Village Tsodna to the first village of Dagestan is 50-60 km. During the Soviet Union this route had been relatively easy to cross; there were no administrative borders. People from both the Georgian and the Dagestani side used that route. During the Soviet Union it was an internal administrative border but post Soviet union an international state border between Georgia and Dagestan.<sup>21</sup> established. There were border guards on both sides of the borders, but it was still possible to cross the border through the Caucasus Mountains, indeed, people were still using that route until 2005. At the end of 2005, the relations between Georgia and Russia were tense and this political situation has produced and border heavily militarized border. Since 2005 the border through Adalai Mountain has been totally closed<sup>22</sup>.

I was interested to know more about the everyday life of the villagers of Village Tsodna during the Soviet Union when the border was open and people were moving freely between Dagestan and Georgia. How did they use the route across the Adalai Mountain? Was it an official border or not? How often did they use it? Was it open and passable during all the seasons?

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<sup>21</sup> The state border was drawn through the Adalai Mountain.

<sup>22</sup> According to <http://pirveliradio.ge/index.php?newsid=28787> from 1<sup>st</sup> August of 2014 between Georgia and Dagestan (Russian federation) will start making of new road through Caucasus Mountain.

One of my informants, 78 year old Haji remembers well everyday life during the Soviet Union. He has children who live in Makhachkala (Dagestan). I chose him because I was told that he hosted a lot of people from Dagestan, who used to come to Georgia to trade. I was also told that he passed the closed border in 2007.

- Which route did you use to get to Dagestan during the Soviet Union?

- *When the route was open during the Soviet Union, we were going from here (pointing towards Mountains). It is the nearest route. If you start in the morning, you will be in Makhachkala in the afternoon. We used horses. At that time the people were coming and going freely. Now it is closed, there is 'tamojnyia' [he used the Russian word 'Tamojnyia' which means 'customs']; there stand the militaries on both sides. We used to pass the border before 2005 but since that [i.e. since 2005] it is impossible.*

- Who used that route through Adalai Mountain and in which case?

- *All the people used it. For example I lived here; my relatives and friends from Dagestan came here. They traded here.*

- What were they trading with?

- *Mostly they brought cheese, wool, sheep and cows. They stayed here until they sold them. Our village was full of people. After selling they bought goods, food, alcohols and went back in Dagestan. Imagine, there are three hundred kilometers from Bejita and Antsukhi [the regions in Dagestan which are close to the border of Georgia] to Makhachkala, when from Bejita and Antsukhi to our village there are just sixty kilometers. So the people from that region used to come to trade in Georgia. When they visited Village Tsodna we hosted them. We also went to Bejita and Antsukhi. In case of a wedding or if we had some job we went to Dagestan through that route. Sometimes people used to steal horses and sell them in Dagestan and vice versa. They also used the same route . When you pass Adalai Mountain from here the first is Bejita region then in 27 kilometers is Antsukhi region. We are from Antsukhi region. As I know from old people, in the old times our ancestors did not live here during the whole year. They used to arrive through the route of Adalai Mountain in September. As I know there was no Village Vera, it was just a field, so our ancestors had sheep and cows, and in winter they stayed here; in summer they went back to Dagestan. The villagers of Village Chalaubani [a village inhabited by*

ethnic Dagestani] during the Soviet Union went to Dagestan through the Adalai Mountains. They had hundreds of sheep. They took sheep to Dagestani fields in summer; after the collapse of the Soviet Union it was impossible to scatter sheep to Dagestan, so they sold most of their sheep. When the border was closed there were not enough fields for that number of sheep we had at that time. After collapsing of the Soviet Union neither our sheep went to Dagestan, nor came here. I remember that we went for hunting to Dagestan. There are a lot of wild beasts. The air and water are so clear that if someone drinks alcohol he cannot get drunk.

- How often did you use that route to get to Dagestan and vice versa?

- I used it when I wanted to go to Dagestan, but because of snow it is impossible in winter. It is a little bit dangerous route, for example I remember that at the end of spring it was very difficult to pass the Samuri River. Once when we were going to Dagestan and were passing the river, at that time the snow was melting and the Samuri River was very strong and fast, it took two horses and several sheep from us. If you know the way it is not difficult, but if you do not know then it is.

Several weeks later, I decided to see the old route to Dagestan through Adalai Mountains. I asked in the village if someone knew the situation near the border; if it was possible to go there or not. One of my key informants told me that it was possible to go to the Georgian military base, but after it I would not be allowed to go. The following day I went from Village Tsodna by foot. First I passed Village Vera, then Village Sopeli and Village Gachedili. It was 10-12 km from Village Tsodna to the Georgian military base. When I went near the base one soldier asked me who I was. I said that I was a student of Bergen University and doing my fieldwork in Village Tsodna. I said that I was interested to see the old route or as much of it as possible. They allowed me to go 3-4 km from the base to the route towards the Adalai Mountains. They told me it was dangerous to walk further than 3-4 km, because of the Russian military was located in the upper parts of the mountain. I started hiking. It was the most challenging route I had ever seen. It would be impossible to use a normal car to pass that way. I realized that it is possible to pass that way only by horses or jeeps. After half an hour of hiking I stopped and looked around. It was an amazing view. It was possible to see Villages Tsodna, Vake, Vera, Chalaubani, and Sopeli. After coming down from the mountain the Georgian soldiers invited me to supper. They told me that Adalai Mountain route was closed by the Russians in 1995, but that people would still use it to go through to Dagestan and vice versa, in 2005, however, the border was totally closed from the Russian side, sealed off and guarded with heavy artillery which is still there.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union new state borders between post-Soviet countries were established. There were border guards on both sides of border through Adalai Mountain, but this border had been relatively easy to cross but it was impossible to use that way for trade. During Soviet Union, people from Dagestan were trading in Kvareli region, and Dagestani villages were full of people; Because of the shortest way from Dagestan to Georgia, Kvareli region was central place/bazaar for trade for Dagestani who were living in Bejta and Antsukhi (in Dagestan). For Avars shepherding was traditional form of life. During several generations Dagestani shepherds were taking sheep in summer from Kvareli to Dagestani fields and in winter back in Georgia. Before state borders established between Dagestan and Georgia, Avars in Georgia had hundreds of sheep; after the establishing border it was impossible to scatter sheep to Dagestani fields, so they were able to sell sheep.

During winter if way through Adalai Mountain was closed (because of snow), Avars were using second alternative road way through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border; from Georgia first Avar pass Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya and enter in Dagestan. Avars were using this alternative way until 1994. In 1994 political situation between Russia and Chechnya have brought considerable changes for Avars everyday life in Georgia.

According to Florian Mühlfried (2011: 353) *“in the early 1990s, the Caucasian mountain range between Russian Federation and Georgia mutated from an easily permeable intrastate border into a real international boundary.”* In following section I will write how state politics in Caucasus region push Avars to finding new ways with Dagestan.

### **New road for passing border**

In this chapter I am going to write about closed border between Georgia and Dagestan (Russian federation) in case of Kazbegi Zemo Larsi and Adalay Mountain Borders. I am going to describe how Avars from the village Tsodna found the alternative way through the Dagestan.

In different periods Avars from the village Tsodna used to arrive by various ways from Dagestan to Georgia and vice versa. During the Soviet Union Avars were using as the way of Adalai Mountain as Kazbegi Zemo Larsi Border. From 1994 until now Avars are using the way

through Baku, Azerbaijan. After the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border (in 2010) passing Georgian- Azerbaijani border for Avars get different function.

The way of Adalai Mountain was closed in 1995. As my informants told me, closing way of Adalai Mountain was not a big problem to pass the border through Caucasus mountains until 2005. As Florian Mühlfried argues “the main problem for the local population on the Georgian side was not so much the closing of the border, which that time [1990s] had not yet been fully executed, but the lack of control over it”(2010:353). In 2005 border of Adalai Mountain was totally closed. About this reason, Avars from the village Tsodna started using third country – Azerbaijan to get to Dagestan and vice versa. Avars were using Azerbaijan to get in Dagestan not only from 2005( when Adalai Mountain Border was totally closed), but also in 1990s ( It has several reasons, and I will write about that down). Avars from the village Tsodna still are passing Georgian-Azerbaijani border but reason of this is different than it was in 1990s.

The second way which Avars from the village Tsodna were using during Soviet Union was through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border. Avars were passing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border rarely because it is long way to get in Dagestan. To get in Dagestan passing through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, Avars were entering in Ossetia, Chechnya, Ingushetya and at last in Dagestan. Because of the war in Chechnya in 1994 (from 1994 to 1996 was a conflict between the Russia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria) Avars from the village Tsodna stopped passing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border; but they had relatives in Dagestan, so they start finding new ways to get in Dagestan<sup>23</sup>. One of the road ways to Dagestan was through the Azerbaijan. From the village Tsodna border of Georgia-Azerbaijan is very close<sup>24</sup>.

During my fieldwork I met several persons who were passing border to Dagestan through Azerbaijan. I chose one informant Abdula who was working as bus driver in 1992- 1998. He is 56 years old man. Abdula was bus driver; in 1992-1993 he was driving bus from Georgia to Dagestan through the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border and vice versa. As he told me he was taking ten to twenty persons with their goods every week from Georgia in Dagestan. He has wife, who

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<sup>23</sup> Avars from the village Tsodna were passing border through the Adalai Mountain, but it was possible to pass a mountain only with horses. If someone was passing border with his car, he was passing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border until 1994.

<sup>24</sup> I was passing Georgia-Azerbaijan Border during my fieldwork; it takes 40 – 45 minutes by car from the village Tsodna to the Georgian- Azerbaijan border.

is living in Dagestan; Abdula did not see her since 2005, because his wife did not have Russian passport, and she cannot pass the border. Abdula has Georgian passport but he cannot get visa to get in Dagestan. As he told me her wife cannot pass border because it is not legal for her; if Russian border guards saw that she did not have passport they will catch her.

-*“It was poverty in 1990s. Everything was destroyed; people in Georgia were hungry<sup>25</sup>. It was better situation in Dagestan. Our people [i.e. Avars from Georgia] start trading goods from Dagestan. Only we [i.e. ethnic Avars] could bring goods in Georgia. From Georgia to Dagestan we were taking tea and persimmon. I was bus driver that time. We were bringing from Dagestan to Georgia flour, rice, oil and sugar; it was difficult to find food in Georgia during that time. We were buying food in Dagestan and selling here. I was passing border every week.”*

-In which way you were getting to Dagestan?

-*“Until 1994 I was using Kazbegi way [i.e. Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border]; then when Russian start war in Chechnya I start using way through Baku [i.e. Azerbaijan]. In Chechnya was robbing, killing people; no one was going there.”*

- Why you did no use way through Baku to get in Dagestan until 1994?

-*“It is 300 km longer then the way of Kazbegi. From here [i.e. from the village Tsodna] it needs two day through Azerbaijan to get to Makhachkala. It would be 1100-1200 km from our village to Makhachkala through the Azerbaijan. It was not also easy to pass Azerbaijani border. In Azerbaijan also were police and military. It was also dangerous passing border through Azerbaijan. When Azerbaijani see that I was taking goods they needed money, I was giving them and it was not only in border but during whole way in Azerbaijan. In 1997-1998 they [i.e. Azerbaijani] start robbing and killing people. As I was told thirteen buses was robbed by Azerbaijan just in one day. Once I was coming with seventeen passengers from Dagestan. My bus was full of food. Near the Ialakh (it is place in Azerbaijan) soldiers stop my bus. They told me that they did not have time for checking the bus until evening; I realize that they were going to rob my bus. I give money, thinking that they will allow me to go, but they did not. Then they bit me and my passengers and rob my bus. After that I stop driving bus through Azerbaijan.”*

- How you contact with your relatives if you did not pass Georgian-Azerbaijan border?

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<sup>25</sup> In Georgia in 1990s were several inter-ethnic wars, such as war in Abkhazia and in Ossetia.

*-“Some people were using that way [i.e. way through Baku], but for me it was better to use the way through Adalai Mountain. From 2000 it was not dangerous to go to Dagestan from Baku; a lot of people from our village were using that road, but after opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border we are not passing Georgian-Azerbaijan border to get to Dagestan, because it is longer than the way through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi”.*

During my fieldwork I hear that people were talking about going in Azerbaijan. I was wandering why they wanted to go in Azerbaijan, because shorter way from the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border to Dagestan was open. One day I hear from my key informant that his son Rasul and his family needed to go in Azerbaijan next week. Rasul was living in Dagestan since 1995. He has wife and two sons. He decides to live in the village Tsodna. As he says his father is quite old and needs to be taken care of; besides he prefers to be in the village quietly and have sheep then in Makhachkala. Notwithstanding that he does not have a passport of a Georgian citizen and is obliged to leave the country (Georgia) in every three months, he still manages to constantly stay in Georgia. When the visa period expires he really does leave Georgia and crosses to neighboring Azerbaijan \_ Zaqatala or Beyleqan. As he leaves the borders of Georgia he has a right to return to Georgia the same day. Like Rasul many old people do the same and every third month they cross Azerbaijan not to ‘spoil’ their Russian passports. When Avars from the village Tsodna wanted to pass Georgian-Azerbaijan border, they are collecting and calling to the Shalva. Shalva is ethnic Georgian from the village Vera. He is bus driver. One day Rasul call to Shalva and told that he wanted to go in Azerbaijan. I decide to go with them. It was early morning when Shalva and Rasul came front of my host house. I sit in the bus; Rasul show houses of persons who were coming with us. Shalva told me that this year a lot of Avars came from Dagestan, who is staying here more than three months. They have Russian passports and after three months of staying in Georgia they need to pass border, another case they will get problems [i.e. deportation] from Georgia. After 40-45 minutes we were in the Georgian-Azerbaijan border. Georgian border guards check our passports and we enter to the side of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani border guards collect our passports and ask to wait. After several minutes one person from police start giving us our passports and we enter in Azerbaijan. Now we had stamps in our passport that we left Georgia and enter in Azerbaija. After 30 min we were in town Beyleqan. We left in Beyleqan bazaar several hours and went back in Georgia.

In result of various interviews and simple conversations, I can say that in different periods Avars used various ways from Dagestan to Georgia and vice versa. State politic push them to find new paths with Dagestan; I agree with Radu's (2010) point, that border is one of the actors among multiple actors.

In 2010 Georgia has opened the motor road for the citizens of Russia, they arrive from Vladikavkaz. From Dagestan, namely from Makhachkala they first pass Chechnya, Ingushetia, then Ossetia and they enter Georgia. This road is shorter (with 300 km) than the other road\_ Makhachkala (Dagestan, Federation of Russia), Baku (Azerbaijan) and Georgia. It is also noteworthy that those parts of Avari people, living in Russia or Ukraine, arrive in Georgia only for several months, mainly in summer when their children have vacations (school, University).

Following section tells about the social processes which comes after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi Border. The border between Georgia and Russian federation was closed in 2006 until 2010. Border is open for Russian citizens, who are allowed to pass Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border without any visa; If Georgian citizens are passing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, they used to have Russian visa, which is not so easy to get. So, for ethnic Dagestani , who are citizen of Georgia, is very difficult to pass border through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi; this is one of the main reason of increasing of visitors last two years from Dagestan (Russian federation) in the village Tsodna. After the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border and increasing of young generation from Dagestan in the village Tsodna, started socio-cultural changes among Avars in Georgia (see chapter three).

### **Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border is open**

I arrived in Village Tsodna in July. My host was the old mullah - Murad. He has five children, among them four boys and one daughter \_ Zeinab. The boys lived in Dagestan and his daughter with him. Currently (I mean July and August) two of his sons \_ Rasul and Temur are visiting their father with their families. Almost in every family in the village there were guests from Dagestani or Russia visiting their parents or relatives. There were also the ethnic Dagestani who arrived from Ukraine. They arrived by their cars. For instance Rasul and Temur arrived by their (Temur's) mini-bus. One of my research questions was, by which way the Avars arrive in Georgia and vice versa. Since when Dagestani start passing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border? What kind of changes made opening of border between Georgia and Russia.



Rasul told me that since for the last two years Georgia had opened the motor road for the citizens of Russia, they arrived from Vladikavkaz (i.e. the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border). From Dagestan, namely from Makhachkala, they first pass Chechnya, Ingushetia, then Ossetia and they enter Georgia. This road is shorter (with 300 km) than the other road - Makhachkala (Dagestani, the Russian Federation), Baku (Azerbaijan) and Georgia. They were using the road to get in Dagestan through Azerbaijan from 1995 till 2010. It is also noteworthy that those parts of the Avar people, living in Russia or Ukraine, arrive in Georgia only for several months, mainly in summer when their children have vacations (school, University). According to Georgian Border Cross Statistic<sup>26</sup> in case of Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border in 2012 border was crossed by 27% of Armenians, 3% of Ukrainian, 5% Azerbaijani, 6% Georgian, 1% 'Others' and 58 % of Russian federation, and within 5% of Dagestani. In 2013<sup>27</sup> percent of crossing Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border by Russian citizens was 56% within 11% of Dagestani.

There are several reasons why they may arrive from Dagestan for several days or weeks within various periods of a year, these reasons are: in case a parent, relative or a close acquaintance passes away in the village; in case they have a wedding and the son-in-law or the daughter-in-law has any relationship (or has parents or relatives in Village Tsodna) with the village; village celebration - wrestling which has been held on every 21<sup>st</sup> of August for the last two years with the initiative of the businessmen living in Dagestan (see next chapter); for Kurban Bayram holiday coming after Ramadan in two months and ten days ( In 2013 it was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October).

After the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border visitors from Dagestan are increasing every year. Mostly, from Dagestan are coming those Avars (mostly young generation) who left Georgia in 1990s. Some of them educated in Dagestan in Madrassa, some of them had money; so, they have power and are able to make some socio-cultural and economic changes in the village Tsodna. According to Donnan and Wilson (2001: 63) "border people can be seen most useful in terms of their ethnic and national identities... The identities cannot be studied in a political vacuum, however, no matter how hard some anthropologists try to portray them as local isolates, largely divorced from the ideas and actions of state politics."

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/davidalaverdashv-1553436-2012/>

<sup>27</sup> [http://police.ge/files/pdf/statistika%20da%20kvleebi\\_new/geo/sazgvriss%20kvetis%20statistika/2013/%282013-~1.pdf](http://police.ge/files/pdf/statistika%20da%20kvleebi_new/geo/sazgvriss%20kvetis%20statistika/2013/%282013-~1.pdf)

In following Chapter I will discuss about social and cultural changes based on everyday activities, rituals, ceremonies in the village Tsodna which comes after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border. I will touch some cultural activities, celebrations which symbolizing power and Identity of Avars.

## Chapter Three

### **New processes after the opening of the border: Symbolizing power and identity**

As Donnan and Wilson points out *“all culture is based on shared symbols, and all social and political systems are structured and expressed through complex relations of symbols and rituals. In the study of nations and states, steeped in rationalist and materialist models, these points are often missed. But to understand politics in any society it is necessary to understand how symbolic enters into politics, how political actors consciously and unconsciously manipulate symbols, and how these dimensions relate to the material bases of political power”*(2001:65). Itself, symbols which are part of culture and everyday life has no single meanings; it can illustrate as identity of society as power. Symbol, for example a cross, and everyday activity as cutting vineyards ( I will write in following sections) can be seen as a remarkable tool of ‘our group’s’ space and place. Symbols are actors, which creates spaces and places. So, the symbols are playing one of the central roles amongst many other actors of ‘becoming’ the border between two or more society. According to Munn’s (2003:93) idea that “we have here a complex kind of relative spacetime, not simply a set of determinate locales of “place”, Radu (2010) suggest space is more than particular location and ‘culture’; “space is not fixed , nor exterior to social relations and practice. Also, time is constitutive of the ways people act in space”( Radu 2010:418).

*“It is easy to ask people about their identities, but more difficult to discern how their actions and identities are related. Nevertheless, anthropologists have enjoyed some success. One of the most important means used by anthropologists to explore ethnic and national identities, at the borders and elsewhere, has been through the study of symbols and rituals”*( Donnan and Wilson 2001:65).

In following sections I am going to write about everyday activities, rituals, ceremonies and religious conflict in the village Tsodna, which started after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, and argue that the opening of Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border push people in the village Tsodna into the new socio-cultural processes. Main questions of this chapter are: how changing of border politics affected on the Dagestanis everyday life? And how minorities find a place in an ethnically diverse and rapidly changing society?

In following section, I will write about new activity in village such as cutting down vineyards, in which we can see symbolic elements of being part of ‘our group’, i.e. identity of the villagers and ‘demarcation’ of ‘Muslim space’.

### **Vineyards: Past and Present**

*“Culture inscribes state territory, national sovereignty, and ethnic national and other identities at borders, through a review of anthropological analyses of such things as rituals, symbols, informal economics, sexual and body politics, and the negotiation of meanings and values both within and across state border” (Donnan and Wilson 2001:62).*

In this section I will write about the vineyards: it’s past and present. I will first, discuss the past and present perspective of vineyards in village Tsodna. I will show how culture of vineyards start changing and ‘cutting down’ after the opening border. What is the reason(s) of cutting down vineyards, and still why some persons (mostly old generation) in the village Tsodna has vineyards and wine at home.

Georgian Wine making culture is one of the most ancient in the world. According to Ulrica Soderlind (2013) “the beginning of human civilizations is closely connected to the development of agriculture and the history of cultivated plants, and Georgia played a crucial role in this process. One of the reasons for that is that wine culture in Georgia can be traced to early prehistoric times. The research of linguists indicates that the root of the Indo-European term for ‘wine’ – *u(e/o) iano* which means wine – might derive from the Georgian word *Rvino* [Rvino].The archaeological discovery of cultivated vines in Georgia supports the linguistic theory of the origin of the word ‘wine’. Cultivated grape pips have been found on the archaeological site ‘Shulaveris Gora’ (situated in the trans-Caucasus region of modern Georgia). The site is dated to sixth – fourth millennium B.C. and belongs to the Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe chalcolithic culture”<sup>28</sup>.

In the Qvareli region where I did my field research, is well known for its vineyards and winemaking. Before 1970 around the village Tsodna there were mostly vineyards which belonged to the village Balgojiani. The inhabitants of Village Tsodna needed to have their own

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.heritagedaily.com/2013/10/short-overview-of-wine-in-georgia/74319>

field for cows and sheep, for this reason these vineyards were cut down in 1970. Though it seems the native people (from Village Tsodna) did not stop their ‘relationship’ with vineyards. During the Soviet Union, when there were the so called “Kolmeurneobebi” (“collective farms”) in Georgia, the inhabitants of Village Tsodna picked grapes and made wine and vodka. According to my informants a lot of people were coming from Daghestan to buy Georgian wine and vodka; they were staying in village Tsodna selling their goods <sup>29</sup>and buying wine and vodka for the money they earned. Sometimes people exchange their goods directly for wine and vodka without the medium of money. After the Soviet Union collapsed, and borders between countries were established, trade of wine and vodka from village Tsodna was stopped. Each house in the village sits on 2500 square meters of land. Mostly this land is cultivated. During my fieldwork I saw several families who have vineyards on their land and also the characteristic ‘Kvevri’.

“A Kvevri (Georgian: ქვევრი) (often incorrectly spelled as "Qvevri") is a large (800-3500 litres) earthenware vessel originally from Georgia in the Caucasus and dating back to about 8000 BC. It has an inside coat of beeswax, resembles an amphora without handles and is used for the fermentation and storage of wine, often buried below ground level or set into the floors of large wine cellars.

The kvevri is part of traditional Georgian wine making. In the past it was also used for storing grain, butter, cheese, vodka, marinades and a host of perishable foodstuffs, though it was developed primarily for wine making in Georgia. Such large ceramic storage vessels were made in many countries, though none can claim the central importance of large ceramic vessels for wine fermentation.”<sup>30</sup>The Kvevri is part of traditional Georgian wine making.

At the end of August I visited Suleiman’s (one of my informants) house. He is an 87 year old man living alone in Village Tsodna. During our interview he laid the table and brought his home-made vodka. Every year he makes 30-40 liters of vodka and 100-120 liters of wine. During our conversation he showed me his ‘Marani’ [i.e. a place or a room where people keep alcohol and some special instruments for vineyard] and kvevri. In the course of our conversation he remembered the past and made some comparison with present. He mentioned the meaning of vineyards in the past and present everyday lives of Village Tsodna and its villagers. I asked him:

-“ When did you put the Kvevri inside your house?

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<sup>29</sup> Cheese, sheep, cows, horses, vessel and etc.

<sup>30</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kvevri>

*-“I do not remember exactly when, but it was before this house was built in 1962. Not many villagers have kvevri, but everyone used to make wine and vodka in old times, not like now. Then we had very good relationship with the neighbors inside the village. We used to go from one house to another, drink, sing and play. We helped each other during vintage. Now in the village the men are afraid to invite the other man (their friends) to their houses to drink, talk or for have fun. The husbands are afraid of their wives’; they do not allow the man to drink with their friends or guests. They have vineyards, but they cannot drink at home, because they are afraid of their wives; because of this they buy alcohol from the booth market and drink out of the village. The people, who want to drink wine or vodka, do not want to be seen by their neighbors, the mullah or their wives. They [i.e. the men] are shy. In old times everyone in the village was very happy but now everybody looks sad. I do not condemn women, because a wife needs to do housework and not to work instead of men, for example in the vineyard. I never allow my wife to work in the vineyard, because it is not a woman’s work. I do not want to eat grapes picked or drink wine made by a woman. Now our men are very lazy, and women work in the vineyards, and all kinds of work in Village Tsodna are done by women, because of this these men cannot drink wine made by their wives, they do not have access to wine or vodka. Therefore, women sell wine and vodka in Makhachkala, they have a right to do that.”*

During my six-month fieldwork in Village Tsodna I saw a lot of women working on land, but only few men were working on land and most of them were not from Village Tsodna, they are ethnic Georgians, from neighboring villages who take money for work. One of such families, having vineyards and Kvevri, was my host family. Murad paid money to his ethnic Georgian friend for the work in the vineyard. Once I was interested to see his “Marani”. He opened the door and I saw several Kvevri, but they were empty [i.e. there was no wine]; I never saw anybody in the family drinking wine either. It was impossible to eat so many grapes in several months; it was also impossible to sell grapes in bazaar, because this was the region where all the families have their own vineyards and no one buys or sells grapes in the bazaar. So, what happened with the grapes from Village Tsodna? At the end of September my host family had vintage. Murad’s daughter and wife collected the grapes. In October Murad’s son Zelimkhan visited his father for the second time [in 2013]. One of the reasons of his visit was Muslim celebration of Kurban Bayram (celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013 )<sup>31</sup>. One evening in Zelimkhan’s car I saw several boxes full of grapes and Georgian ‘Churchkhela’ [it is made of grape must, flour and nuts. One of the best Churchkheles are made in Kvareli region. The

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<sup>31</sup> On the Islamic calendar being lunar and that in 2013 Kurban Bayram fell on 15 October.

Churchkhelas were made by Murad's daughter]. He was going to Makhachkala to sell the grapes and Churchkhela. Like Zelimkhan a lot of people from Makhachkala visited their families at the end of September to trade with grapes. As Zelimkhan told me grapes and Churchkhela are very expensive in Makhachkala [i.e. in Dagestan] and it is very difficult to find grapes as good as these. The next evening I talked with Rasul (Murad's second son) about vineyards and wine. He told me that he wanted to cut his vineyards the following year and leave only as much as their family would need to eat grapes.

*-I want to plant maize and use the land for sheep. I also need to take out the Kvevri from the ground and put them away.*

*- Why do you need to do that? Is not it good to make business and sell grapes or alcohol in Dagestan as you and your father do it?*

*- Yes, it was a good business during the Soviet Union, when all the people were atheists and did not know Koran; when the shortest border between Georgia and Dagestan was open; but now it is not good, because I know that even if I do not drink alcohol but sell it, it is a big sin. I can make money by selling sheep and I can have several plants of vine just for eating grapes.*

During my fieldwork I heard that several families are going to cut vineyards which were planted more than 40-45 years ago. Based on my ethnographic data material, I suggest that, these processes (cutting vineyards) are connected on the one hand with a new religious turn in the region represented mostly by the young generation, who preaches that that using or selling alcohol is sin haram, and on the other hand with the closure of the nearest and most accessible border between Georgia and Dagestan. The vineyards are losing the 'meaning' they had during Soviet Union when the nearest border between Georgia and Dagestan was open; natives from the village were selling wine and vodka, or exchanging it with consumer goods from Daghestan in Georgia and vice versa. The closing of the border in 2005 from the Russian side made it impossible to sell goods, including wine in Dagestan. The Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, the main border between Georgia and Russia which was opened in 2010 is too far away to make trading with wine profitable. The opening of the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, however, makes it possible for Dagestani citizens who have relatives in the village Tsodna to visit the village and spend several months there. As I was told that some of these relatives from across the border were

studying in the Madrasa<sup>32</sup> in Makhachkala and they have good knowledge of the Qur'an and the Shari'a, Islamic laws and rules for behavior. So, vineyards are losing their economic function in the village, but they are gaining new symbolic function. The person who cuts vineyards makes visible to neighbors and co-villagers that he and his family (i.e. his household) are good Muslims; earlier making and selling wine would not affect the standing of someone as a good Muslim. Nowadays moral and loyal community members are those persons and families, those who follow the laws of Qur'an: praying five times per day, fasting, not drinking alcohol, not smoking, celebrating Mawlid (see following section) not wedding ceremonies. Some people do continue to drink wine, however, but feel they cannot do this in the open as they used to at and risk being seen by the Mullah or neighbors but this is difficult because the village is small and everyone knows each other (see also chapter four). Still there are some persons like Suleiman who has vineyards and drinking wine. Analyzing that fact that Suleiman is making wine and there are some people who are drinking wine outside from village I can argue: First, in case of Suleiman, he is living alone, his children are not coming from Dagestan to see him, so he is doing wine as he was doing it during Soviet Union. Second, during my fieldwork I was participating with those persons, from the village Tsodna, who are drinking wine or vodka. Mostly they are drinking alcohol outside from the village, in the field where forest starts, near the ethnic Georgian village Vake. In my point of view that means that they are drink alcohol outside from the Muslim space and place, in which drinking alcohol is not allowed.

After the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border new processes in village such as cutting down vineyards had started. As I mentioned cutting down of vineyards performs and identifies that person and his household is 'good Muslim. The people identify themselves as Muslims; within this people are persons like Suleiman, who identify themselves same time as Muslim who is keeping traditional form of life.

In following section is touching new religious processes in the village Tsodna. It explains idea about the building of a new mosque which comes from the new generation. Itself the mosque as a symbol presents identity of society or state.

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<sup>32</sup>A higher school of Islamic learning



## **Debating on the Building of a New Mosque**

In this section I am going to focus on different views about Building of a new mosque. As I mentioned in previous section after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border religious changes and ‘making’ boundaries in the village Tsodna is visible not only in case of cutting down vineyards, but also in the building of the new mosque. Itself the idea of building new mosque is coming from those Dagestanis who are living in Dagestan (Russian federation) or in Ukraine. Those Avars are wealthy persons, who started visiting their ancestor’s village Tsodna, started building new hoses after the opening Georgian-Russian border. I am going to write about different debating and views about the building of a new mosque in the village. Before I start writing about the new mosque, let me describe briefly religious situation in the village.

Villagers are Sunni Muslims. Dagestan has one of the largest Sufi communities in Caucasus region. They pray five times per day is the ideal for them. During my six month fieldwork my host and his family members were always praying at home. I was wondering why they were not praying in Mosque? I became interested in the history of mosque. It was built in 1957-1958, when Avars returned from Chechnya (see chapter one). The mosque is situated in the periphery of the village. There is a river on the east side of the mosque and on the other side there are some trees and bushes (at the end of September some people clean bushes, but still there are a lot of them. Surrounding the mosque is the cemetery, so before someone enters the mosque he/she needs to pass by the cemetery. The mosque looks more like a house then the typical mosque which exist in Dagestan or in Georgia. It is a stone building, 70-80 square meters large. It represents a stone building, with the height of 70-80 square meters. In front of the mosque entrance there is a place for washing hands, legs, face, ears and nose (these are five common body parts, which a Muslim needs to wash before praying or entering the mosque). The floor in the mosque is covered by carpets. The space for men and women in the mosque is divided by a curtain. There is a Minbar inside the Mosque. It is a place where the Imam delivers his ceremony every Friday noon prayers and the first day of the both Bayrams. Next to the Minbar is the Mihbar, the decorated niche with indicated direction of Ka’aba (Mecca). This is where the Imam stands when he leads the prayers. I was interested in learning about the meaning and function of the Mosque for the Muslims in the village. My host suggested several persons I could interview about the mosque. One of them was Badrudin, whois 60 years old, living alone and praying five times a day, mostly at home. He went twice to Mecca twice, and therefore is highly respected in

the village. People in the village go to him for advice on religious matters. Badrudin remembered how people practiced religion during the Soviet period.

*“During the Soviet Union when praying in a church or a mosque was not allowed, the people from our village [i.e. Village Tsodna] decided to build a mosque for praying. They were afraid of the government and because of this they decided to build a mosque which looked like a house. The people from the police came to the village several times and asked about the meaning of that building [i.e. mosque], but every time we had the same answer, that the building was built for the cemetery and it was the place for ritual washing of a dead body. It was also the truth, because when someone dies we take him or her to the mosque for the ritual of washing. Therefore, the government did not realize that it was a mosque, and the place where all the people prayed. In the old times here lived a lot of people, I was young and strong. Now it is difficult to go to mosque to pray, because it is far from me. Now our boys [i.e. the young generation who live in Dagestan] are going to build a new mosque in the village. Until that I pray alone at home, but you know it is much better if you pray with a group of people in the mosque, then your praying is much stronger for God than when you pray alone.”*

I was looking to gain insight into the building of a new mosque. I had several questions: Who decide to build the new mosque? Is the idea of the ‘New Mosque’ connected with the opening border or the villagers wanted to build new mosque before opening the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border?

One day I visited a young man named Badrudin from Village Tsodna. He was a mullah until the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013 then he decided to leave his position to the person who came from Dagestan. He lived with his wife and three sons in a small house. He had been studying in Makhachkala for several years, but then he decided to come back to Georgia. When he returned (in 1997) the villagers decided to make him a mullah, because he had studied in Madrassa. Some people said that he had bad habits like smoking cigarettes. It was one of the reasons why he decided to leave his position of a mullah to the other person. His brothers and sisters lived in Dagestan, he had not seen them since 1997, because they did not have Russian passports and if they left Russia they would be deported. He was very nice and open-hearted to me. That evening we had a long conversation about religion and the perspective of the new mosque.

- Who decided to build a new mosque in the village?

- *It has been a long time since we [i.e. the inhabitants of Village Tsodna] wanted to build a new mosque. Several years ago I went to Tbilisi to collect some documents for 'razrishenie' (resolution) to build the new mosque. As you know it needs a lot of money to build something, and as we did not have money, and it was impossible to build the mosque. Now there are some people who say that they can collect money and build the new mosque and the first Madrassa in our village. My brother, it is just politics. They only talk and talk, but as you see building of the new mosque has not started yet. It is like what people do during presidential elections. When several parties say that they will lay the railways, or give some vouchers, or change price of electricity. Everyone wants to be the first, or make some money. I think the people, who said that they would collect money in Dagestan to build the new mosque in the village, did the same like our politicians. If you do something for God, then you need to put everything into your job, business, and trading as well, and your heart needs to be clear. Religion is not business! I know various 'sposobi' [i.e. methods] how to build a mosque in our village. It is not as difficult as they [i.e. the people who said that they would build the new mosque] say. It is not necessary to register the land for the mosque on the name of the mosque, it can be registered as the land for the house, and then the mosque can be built.*

- There is a mosque in the village, isn't there? Why do you need to build a new one? Is not it easier to rebuilt the old one?

- *Yes, we have the mosque, but as you know there is also the cemetery. There are a lot of graves around the mosque. In the old times the graves were behind the mosque, but now the mosque is in the middle of the graves. It is not good to have the mosque in the cemetery. It is not beautiful... Besides, if all the people from village collect together for praying, there is not enough space in the mosque for all of them.*

- I remember Kurban Bayram celebration in mosque but I saw a lot of free space inside the mosque. Do you think that space would not be enough?

- *Yes, because every year more and more people come back from Dagestan to celebrate some special ceremonies in our village. If all of them come together for praying, then there will not be enough space in the mosque. Besides, the other reason is that: as you know we pray five times per day. Imagine in winter we need to pray at five or six o'clock in the morning, when it is night. Besides, Muezzin [i.e. a person who reads Azan [i.e. Islamic call for praying] needs to go alone to the mosque through the cemetery. Believe me it is not easy to walk alone at night, when there*

*is no electricity and light even in the street. Sometimes wolves come down to our village, so it is dangerous. Some people are afraid to enter the cemetery and they do not come to pray. There are a lot of old men and women who cannot walk from their houses so far [i.e. to the mosque] away.”*

People go to the mosque only on special days, for example to ceremonies such as Kurban Bayram, or if someone died in the village. Mostly people pray in their own houses, but in the center of the village there is one house from where Muezzin does Azan five times per day. This house also represents a place where the prayers gather every Friday and pray together.

According to my informants and the ethnographic data collected by me, I can say that there are several reasons to build a new mosque in Village Tsodna. These reasons are: First, the idea which comes from new generation, that people in village must pray together in Mosque. Second, this people had seen and used to pray in Dagestan in big mosques; itself big mosque shows power of state (last years it is a tendency to build biggest mosques in North Caucasus. For example in Chechnya, they built one of the biggest mosques in the world). The old mosque is situated on the periphery of the village and for old people it is difficult to walk one kilometer; some people are afraid to go to mosque through the cemetery when it is dark; The idea of the new mosque occurred to the villagers when the border was open and some people from Dagestan arrived. Most of these people in the village have some kind of power such as: knowledge in the Muslim rules, i.e. power of guiding people and money. As you see, after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border new culture and Islamic traditions started ‘growing’ in the village Tsodna.

In following section I am going to touch ritual changes as wedding ceremony. As cutting of vineyards changing wedding rituals is one of the markers to be a ‘good Muslim’ and member of ‘our group’. It has connection also with economic: traditional wedding rituals need high expenditure.

### **Changing wedding rituals**

In this section I am going to explain changing wedding rituals. According to Donnan and Wilson (2001:66) “rituals are the most formal behavioral patterns in any society, and are certainly amongst the most meaningful of the prescribed behaviors. They are clearly significant acts to

their participants, who as a result are often proud and willing to demonstrate them to anthropologists and other observers”.

During my fieldwork I saw several wedding rituals which were very different from each other. Originally there were two types of wedding rituals which I had seen and participating in the village Tsodna: the first one which villagers call the “usual wedding “, and the second one wedding with celebrating Mawlid. These two wedding rituals were very different from each other; I was wondering why in the village Tsodna was two different sort of wedding rituals? What was the reason of having two different rituals for celebrating a wedding? First, I will give information about Mawlid and in what cases people in the village are ‘making mawlid’; after I will describe how celebrated wedding rituals among Avars were. Then I will compare ‘normal wedding’ and wedding with Mawlid and show reasons of changing wedding rituals in the village Tsodna.

*“Mawlid, also spelled Mawlūd, or Mīlād, in Islām, the birthday of a holy figure, especially the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad (Mawlid an-Nabī). Muḥammad’s birthday, arbitrarily fixed by tradition as the 12th day of the month of Rabī‘ I, i.e., the day of Muḥammad’s death, was not celebrated by the masses of Muslim faithful until about the 13th century. At the end of the 11th century in Egypt, the ruling Shī‘ite Fatimids (descendants of ‘Alī, the fourth caliph, through his wife Fāṭimah, Muḥammad’s daughter) observed four mawlids, those of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, and the ruling caliph. The festivals, however, were simple processions of court officials, held in daylight hours, that culminated in the recitation of three sermons (khutbahs) in the presence of the caliph... The mawlid festival quickly spread throughout the Muslim world, partly because of a contemporary corresponding enthusiasm for Sufism (Islāmic mysticism), which allowed Islām to become a personal experience. Even in Arabia, where the Prophet’s birthplace and tomb had been simply the sites of pious but not required pilgrimage, the mawlid celebrations took hold. Many Muslim theologians could not accept the new festivities, branding them bid‘ahs, innovations possibly leading into sin. The mawlid, indeed, betrayed a Christian influence; Christians in Muslim lands observed Christmas in similar ways, and Muslims often participated in the celebration. Modern fundamentalist Muslims such as the Wahhabiyyah still view the mawlid festivities as idolatrous. Mawlids, however, continue to be celebrated and have been extended to popular saints and the founders of Ṣūfī brotherhoods.*

*The mawlid poems, which relate Muhammad's life and virtues, are also widely popular outside the times of regular feasts. Mawlids are also recited in commemoration of deceased relatives.*"<sup>33</sup>

In the village Tsodna, people are 'making Mawlids'<sup>34</sup> very often. My host family was doing it every month. Family is making Mawlid, when head of the family decides, mostly in case of good news as wedding, birthday, also after the collecting praying in his house.

It was common an agreement marriage between the villagers Tsodna. There were special persons who had mediator's function between girls and boys families. Mostly mediators were the old and responsible person(s) from the village Tsodna. Mediators had been asked three times for the woman's hand to her father; in case of the positive answer from the woman's family, she [i.e. particular girl] was appointed. Sometimes mediators were performed by the parents of the boy. If the girl refused to marry, then Mullah was talking with her (although it was a few examples when a girl was against marriage). After appointed the girl, the boy's parents were taken to the girl's family gold, food, alcohol; that was the way of engagement, but still engaged couples was living separately to their parents houses. After engagement (after several months or years) families celebrate wedding ceremony. During wedding ceremony all villagers were participating. Old times the engagement was taken earlier from the cradle as well. It was common in Georgia and in Dagestan also a woman's abduction, after which both sides [i.e. boys as girls] negotiated. During my fieldwork several times I was invited to the wedding ceremony. I decided to have some more deep information about wedding rituals and changes in the village Tsodna. About this I decide to have some informants who remember how wedding was celebrated in the old time and also some new couples which celebrate as "usual wedding" as Mawlid.

My informant Tsadasa was 80 years old man. I chose him because when he was young he was playing on Doli [i.e. Georgian drum] in weddings, and he had seen a lot of wedding ceremonies. I asked him how was celebrated the wedding in the village Tsodna.

*"- It was different, not like now. The first boy never chose the girl, his parents make chose. For example, if his parents like one girl, they were asking to their son if he also like her. Mostly answer was "yes". After that parents [i.e. boy's parents] were visiting to the family of the girl, which they like. Her parents [i.e. girl's parents] never told directly responsible for the boy's parents. Her parents need to talk first with their relatives and if they agreed for wedding, then*

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/370339/mawlid>

<sup>34</sup> Natives are using Russian term: 'sdelats Mawlid'

*they [i.e. girl's parents] will agree for the wedding . A boy's parents were visiting to a girl's family after ten days to hear the answer. If girl's family agrees about the wedding, then they decide the day of engagement and the day of wedding”.*

Until the wedding ceremony (It can be one year from the agreement of both families) boy's family were visiting girl's house. They were doing presents such as: clothes, sweets and etc. Wedding was started in bride's house, and people were celebrating one day; after husband took bride in his house and also they celebrate one day; and third day wedding was celebrated in wife's house. So wedding was celebrated in the village Tsodna during three days.

*“-During wedding people were dancing. I was playing in doli. Sometime some people were drinking alcohol. All of the villagers were very happy.”*

During my six month fieldwork I was participating several wedding ceremony. One of them was celebrated with Mawlid. It is new element of wedding ceremony in the village Tsodna . As my informant Tsadasa told me after the collapsing of the Soviet Union some people start to do Mawlid and not usual weddings because of poverty. During the Mawlid boy's family lay the table. There are two tables one for men and another one for women. No one is drinking alcohol and it's is finished after two-three hour. There is no music or any dances as it is in the “usual wedding” ceremonies. According to my informants celebrating Mawlid during wedding ceremonies in the village Tsodna is getting more common, then the “usual wedding” (as my informants call it) what was more common until 2012.

According to my ethnographic data material, changing wedding ceremonies from “usual wedding” (which celebrates with music, dance, alcohol) to Mawlid is connected with the opening the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border in 2010 between Georgia and Russia. I think that the changing of wedding ceremonies in the village Tsodna has several reasons: 1) Economic \_ to celebrate wedding with Mawlid needs low expenditure ; to celebrate ‘usual wedding’ it needs high expenditure. 2) Wedding with Mawlid is celebrated only several hours; ‘usual wedding’ is celebrated during three days. 3) Itself wedding is collective ritual and it is the way of identity \_ celebrating wedding with Mawlid makes it visible in society that the member of society (in this case the Muslim, Dagestani members of the village Tsodna) or his family who celebrate wedding is thru Muslim, and the person who celebrate “usual wedding” is the antipode of the thru Muslim. 4) ‘usual wedding’ is more like ethnic Georgians celebrating wedding rituals, so

changing that ritual in the village Tsodna make boundaries between ‘our’(Dagestani) and ‘their’ (Georgians) wedding rituals.

The following section touches conflict between two villages; the conflict caused by the building Christian symbol \_ a cross in the shared field. I will discuss about the conflict of the cross and within conflicts of senses as seeing and hearing.

### **The Conflict of the Cross: Broadening of Place and Space**

In this section I would like to write about the religious conflict between Village Tsodna and Village Vake. I will show that conflict has deep roots and it is connected with senses as hearing and seeing. Itself one of the main actors of conflict and ongoing processes in the villages Tsodna and Vake is using of new technology during Azaan. Overlapping of ‘other’ space(s) in ‘your’ place make conflicts in case of the villagers Tsodna and Vake. That’s means that there are cultural boundaries between villagers.

Before I start describing the conflict, which make religious picture, I will briefly write about Village Vake. During my fieldwork I visited some of the families from Village Vake. The aim of my visit was to get more rich ethnographic data material about Village Vake and about the conflict which was between Villages Tsodna and Vake in August 2013. My respondents from Village Vake were from an ethnic Georgian family. At first I met them when I was looking for a booth market near Village Tsodna. First I met Nana when I was buying food from her booth market. She is one of the active and well-known people in Village Vake and in Village Tsodna as well. She knows a lot of Avars from Village Tsodna, because the villagers often buy food from her booth market. Nana is a 55year-old woman. She has been living with her husband and daughter in Village Vake since 1993- 1994. In 1988 they bought a house from the person who came down from the High Mountains of Adjara and settled down in Village Vake. Actually she is from Village Vera (it is a neighboring village of Village Tsodna. In Village Vera live ethnic Georgians, who are Christians). After coming to Village Vake, Nana left her house to her son, so her son lives in Village Vera. I was interested in the history of Village Vake and the relationship between the villagers from Village Tsodna and Vake: what it was like in the past and what it is like now. Were there any changes in relationship among the villagers or not? Since when did the conflict between the villagers of Villages Tsodna and Vake start?



-“Before this village [i.e. Village Vake] was built, there was a forest and shrubs here. In the place where our houses are located now, there was a forest which was cut down during the Soviet Union and on the field which is now used for sheep by the Avars, before were vineyards,. Their village [i.e. Village Tsodna] finishes where the ravine is. It is our border [i.e. the border between Villages Tsodna and Vake].

- If there were only vineyards here, then where would the Avars take their sheep for pasturing?

- At that time they had only few sheep. They worked as employees for Georgians. As there is a field instead of vineyards the Avars breed much more sheep. In 1980 there was an earthquake in the high mountains of Adjara and Sachkhere [i.e. in west Georgia] and the government built for them a new village [i.e. Village Vake] and settled those people in Village Vake. There were very good and free places on this territory, for this reason the government decided to build a new village for the Adjarians. The government asked the Avars from Village Tsodna if they agreed to settlement of the Adjarians in the place where now Village Vake is. As you know the Adjarians are Muslims too, so the Avars from Village Tsodna agreed. The government built 150 houses in one year. At first [i.e. in 1980 -1989] there were settled 60 – 64 Adjarian households here. Now there live only four Adjarian families. The reason for leaving Village Vake was bad relationship with the villager of Village Tsodna, and neglect from the government as well. Despite of the same religion [i.e. Islam] they quarreled with each other. At first when the Adjarians were settled here, the Avars did not come to Village Vake, but when the Adjarians from time to time left the village, the Avars started visiting Village Vake, to play football and etc. It was in 1996-1997. Once we heard that some people from the government were coming to Village Tsodna, we were happy, because we thought that they would support us, but they spoke not in favor of us. The Avars told them [i.e. the people from the government] that “if you do not support us, then we will leave Georgia”. The government supported the Avars and consequently the Adjarians were disappointed and now only four Adjarian families are here. If they [i.e. the Adjarians] needed some, help, my family used to help them. The Avars hated our family for this, but now the Adjarians have good relationship with them because of the same religion. On Fridays they pray together in mosque, they [i.e. the Adjarians] do that silently.”

Nana and his husband think that if the government makes it clear for both villagers which territory belongs to them, everything would be fine. “Since the old times till present the government has not made it clear which part of the territory belongs to us [i.e. Village Vake]

*and which part belongs to them [i.e. the inhabitants of Village Tsodna]. For this reason we have disagreement with each other.”*

As Nana told me, the field officially belongs to the government. One of my key informants, from Village Tsodna, told me that the owner of the field was one person, who was a parliamentary deputy during the period of Mikheil Saakashvili [president of Georgia in 2003-2013]. The field, which is one of the sources of the conflict between the villagers of Villages Tsodna and Vake, is located inside Village Vake (see the map). In the center of the field there is a cross (see the photo). Nana told me that the cross was built by the villagers from Village Vake.

*“- It has been a year since the cross was sanctified by the orthodox priests. All the people from Village Tsodna were against but they did not say anything to us; instead of that they were calling the local municipality [i.e. the government authorities in region Kvareli] and claiming against this fact [i.e. placing the cross] and the government authorities [in region Kvareli] were afraid as they thought that we would [i.e. the inhabitants of Villages Tsodna and Vake] start a quarrel. There was too much resistance from the region. When we made the niche [i.e. built the place for the cross], after that a priest came and the place was sanctified. Before that, our boys [i.e. the young generation from Village Vake] made a small cross, when the Avars saw it, they called the local government. After that some people from the local government came to the village and our boys were told that they should stop making the cross. They [i.e. the people from the local government] said that the Avars were asking to build a mosque, but they [i.e. the local government] did not have sources for the mosque, and they asked us to wait, until they regulated the situation. We did not wait for them and decided to build a place for the cross. Everything is built on our own. Some villagers from Village Vake brought stones, some of worked and etc. Several months ago, a person from Village Tsodna took the stencil of our village, hung it on the back of his car and came to the field. With the stencil on his car he was driving and making circles around our cross. Our boys [i.e. the young generation from Village Vake] were very angry. It was good that the police came and nothing happened that day. Then the people from the TV channel came and recorded us (some people from our village and some from Village Tsodna). You know, we are disturbed by their [i.e. the villagers from Village Tsodna] praying.*

- How do they disturb you?

- *You know, they pray five times per day. Before praying the Mullah “kviris” (shouts) [i.e. during the Azan], the voice comes to our village. At night it is horrible, when he [i.e. the Mullah]*

*starts “kvirili” (shouting), dogs bark and sometimes jackals howl from the forest and we cannot sleep. Imagine if someone has a small baby, what happens in his/her house. Though, we do not call anyone to say that they disturb us, because it is their religion and their law. They could use smaller speakers, not as big as that, but they do not do that.*

- Since when have they been using big speakers?

*- It is two or one and a half year, since they have started using speakers. Before they did not have speakers, or maybe they did but the voice did not come to our village.”*

I was interested what function the place, where the cross was, and the cross itself, had for the inhabitants of Village Tsodna. During my fieldwork among the Avars from village Tsodna, I found different perspectives about the cross and fenced sanctified place. I took interviews both from the young and middle-aged Avars (who were sheep-breeders). One day I went to the center of Village Tsodna. Usually it was the place where young people (only men) used to gather and talk. At the time when I went there, only four guys (I knew them before) were there. One of them was Said. He is a 25 year old wrestler. Said was the person who took the stencil of Village Vake. I started interviewing them.

- When did the inhabitants of Village Vake make a cross in the field?

*- Since “Dream” [i.e. “Georgian Dream”\_ a political party in Georgia, was established in April, 2012 by Bidzina Ivanishvili] came last October. There was nothing before the cross only cows and sheep used to eat grass. This was the territory of the village.*

- Which village?

*- Village Tsodna. In old times we had a playground near the valley. All people (from our village and also from Village Vera [i.e. the ethnic Georgian village]) used to play handball, football and etc. The flood destroyed that place. Afterwards we made the playground there, where the cross is now. Some people did not like that we were playing there and decided to build the cross. We cannot play there, because if someone hits the ball it can destroy the cross and cause “spori” (conflict). It is built against us and not for the love of God.”*

I was interested in to see the place which was shared several years ago by ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians as a playground, and now which present Christianity with the symbol of cross. As you know, during my six month I spent some time with the Avar sheep-breeders. Usually to the sheep-breeders go to the field early in the morning, and staying in field until evening. In

Village Tsodna there are some families who have 100-150 sheep. If summer is too hot, there will not be enough grass for sheep. For this reason the villagers of Village Tsodna agreed that if someone had more than 100 sheep, he would need to take them to the mountain in summer. This agreement is considered as non-written law for the villagers of Village Tsodna. Besides, the field is divided in two parts: in upper part (north part) there are only sheep of the sheep-breeders who live in the first and second streets, and the second part is for the sheep-breeders, who live in the third, fourth and fifth streets. According to my informants who were the sheep-breeders, before the ethnic Georgians from Village Vake put the cross and fenced the sanctified territory, the Avars used the field for their sheep. Now they cannot use it as field for their sheep. I wondered why the sheep-breeders could not use that territory, as the fenced territory was only about 10-15 square meters and there was more than 300 square meters of the 'free' territory (see the picture). As it is shown on Picture, that particular field is fenced with the houses (built in 1980s) which belong to the ethnic Georgians from Village Vake. The place looks like a closed circle and the fenced cross itself is in the center of this circle.

According to my ethnographic data material, reason of conflicts between two villages (the village Tsodna and the village Vake) is the source of religion and conflict of place and space . As I mention there are two particular villages ( the village Tsodna and the village Vake), which represents two particular religions ( Islam and Christianity). This conflict is connected with new processes in the village Tsodna which started after the opening of Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border. After the opening border in village for azan people start using new technology \_ big speakers. According to my informant Nana, inhabitants of the village Vake are disturbed by the voice of azan, which is coming from the village Tsodna. Itself azan is symbolizing sense of hearing of Muslim society, but its voice spreads in the village Vake where are living mostly orthodox ethnic Georgians. So in case of village Vake I can say that it is the place which represents for foreigners not only Christians but also Muslim society. So it means that in particular Christian space and place such as the village Vake, somehow (in this case with voice of azan and new technology) exists or enters Muslim space. According to my informants villagers from Tsodna started using big speakers since 2011; when the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border was open and new generation started visiting village Tsodna. After that villagers from Vake started building cross. The cross is symbolizing of Christianity. It shows that in village Vake are living Orthodox Georgians (but there are still the families from Adjara who are Muslims). According to Donnan and Wilson (2001:66) “ A symbol has no single meaning, it can be seen to be ambiguous, yet

few if any ritualistic symbols are ambiguous to everyone. Thus, no matter how clear a symbol is to some people, it will be obscure or unintelligible to others". The sanctified place, with six meter highest cross is the visible symbols of Christianity for inhabitants of the village Vake, but it has different meaning for inhabitants of the village Tsodna; from the interview of Said, I can say that Avars see cross in the old playground as a 'hook' of conflict. In this case the cross stands for the Orthodox population and their claim to the land which was shared land by Christians and non-Christians before the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi Border. Itself the cross and azan from big speakes represents religious identity, and the power on the place. It is also the way of 'competition' between religious among villagers; showing each other that 'they' are stronger in 'their' religion then 'their' neighbors (from neighboring villages).

In following section I am going to focus on the new event which is taking part in the village Tsodna. This celebration symbolizing power and identity of Avars.

### **Wrestling near the Border: Symbolized Celebration of Power and Identity**

In this section I am going to write about new event which is celebrated in the village Tsodna; "[the event] is at once public and private, potential and real, participating in the becoming of another event and the subject of its own becoming" (Radu 2010:412). Event in the village Tsodna is celebrated with wrestling; itself wrestling symbolized celebration of power and identity between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians. Wrestling represents embodied straggle between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Dagestani, it means that there is potential conflict and within border has issue to prefer people for fight. It is symbolized celebration of power and identity. According to (Suny 1999/2000 : 144) "*identities are embedded in the stories we tell about ourselves individually and collectively, implied in the way individuals and groups talk and give meaning to their being, their selves, their roles. Identities –whether gender, ethnic, religious, national, or state identity - are constrained by experiences and available possibilities and might be thought of as part of a search for a usable past and an acceptable modernity to stave off anxiety about the present and future*". Anthropologist Mathijs Pelkmans, who was doing fieldwork in Georgia-Turkish border. In his book (2006) Pelkmans discuss about the festival which is called "Colkhoba" argues that such festivals "contributed to ideas of Lazi identity as part of the broader Georgian nation"(2006:62).

It was middle of August, when I observed that a lot of people (new faces) were coming in the village. The number of people in the village was suddenly increased between the 10-13<sup>th</sup> of August. The streets in the village were full of cars with foreign numbers, they were mostly Russian numbers. I wondered what was happening. One evening I asked my host Rasul, why people (the guests from Dagestan, Ukraine) decided so simultaneously to come to the village? He answered: *“There will be wrestling on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August in the village, for this reason our boys (nashi rebiata) come here to participate in wrestling. There will be a lot of sportsmen from different villages of Kvareli region and not only Kvareli region”*. Rasul’s two brothers Zelimkhan and Omar with their families who live in Daghestan (the Russian Federation) drove 700km from Dagestan to see their father Murad and brother Rasul. They came with their own mini-bus (‘marshrutka’). Wrestling was one of the motivation elements to come back to their childhood Village Tsodna and spend some time there. Murad and his wife Shafag (Rasul’s father and mother) were very happy to see their sons and grandsons. From the 10<sup>th</sup> till the 21<sup>st</sup> of August a lot of people visited Rasul’s family. Rasul also his old friends who had just then arrived from Russia. There was merriment in the village.

I was more and more interested in the village celebration - wrestling. I had several questions concerning wrestling. One of my questions was how long wrestling had been celebrated in Village Tsodna? Was it a movable or an immovable celebration? Who was participating in the celebration? Was it only the villagers’ celebration or something more? Who organized wrestling? What type of wrestling was it (was it a usual one or the so called “Georgian Wrestling”, which is very common in that part of Georgia)? Was there any prize for winner or not? Does it have any connection with reopening of the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border (it is the only legal borderland linking Georgia with Russia? The Russians closed it in 2006, but it was open in 2010 by the Georgian side) or not? Who used to visit Village Tsodna? What kind of relations did the visitors have with Village Tsodna? What meaning does wrestling have for the villagers and their visitors?

As I observed it was the second celebration of wrestling in Village Tsodna. One of my key informants Badrudin told me:

*“We celebrate wrestling for the second time. The first celebration was held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August in 2012. It was dedicated to the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Repatriation [i.e. in 1944 under Stalin’s command the Avars were exiled from Georgia to Chechnya near Grozny. The Chechen and*

Ingush people themselves were exiled to Central Asia and Siberia]. *After opening the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border (in 2011 or in 2010 I cannot remember), a lot of people came from Russia, Ukraine and Dagestan. They were repatriates at the time of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Most of them have their own business in Russia, so they have money and can organize wrestling celebration. They visit the village to see their parents, abandoned houses, neighbors, mountains. They want to show their children the place where their roots are”.*

According radu (2010:411) “events, although unique in the social practices and synthesis of life histories they concentrate, make no separations between past and future, but connections into continuity”.

I was looking forward to the day of the wrestling celebration in the village. As I mentioned, Rasul’s brothers Omar and Zelimkhan were visiting the village with their families. Omar had two small sons. It was morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> of August; I came down from my room which was on the second floor and saw that the small kids (four and five years old) were training in wrestling. Their father and uncle were training them, asking questions:

*“Will you struggle tomorrow? (завтра будешь бороться? zavtra budesh barotsija)”. The answer was: “Yes, Dad I will fight with Georgians. (да, папа, я буду драться Грузинами. Да, папа, ia budu dratsya gruzinami). Father smiled and said: “We are not going to fight (драться, drats) with Georgians, we will struggle (бороться, barotsija) with them [i.e. the ethnic Georgians]”.*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of August I woke up early in the morning. It was raining. At 11 o’clock Rasul, his brothers with their sons and me were sitting in the mini-bus (‘marshutka’) and going to the village. We took with us several villagers we met on the way. The place, where wrestling is celebrated, was outside of the village in the field. A lot of cars were driving to the place where wrestling was to be celebrated. Before wrestling started, the field was divided in several parts: on one side gathered the ethnic Dagestani, on the second side the ethnic Azerbaijanis from the neighboring villages and on the third side the ethnic Georgians from different villages. It was still raining. I was standing with my host under the tree. I asked who was participating in wrestling from Village Tsodna. As I observed, the strugglers represented from Village Tsodna came from Dagestan, they were sportsmen in different styles of fights in Dagestan, for example: Judo, kickboxing and etc. Rasul was sad. He said: *“This year we did not bring good sportsmen.*

*They are on the third or second levels in Dagestan, but the Georgians have the first level sportsmen. Besides, our sportsmen do not know the rules of “Georgian wrestling”.*

Before wrestling started, one truck came and spread sawdust on the ground. Several people (boys, old men) started spreading the sawdust and at last it looked like a circle. The rain was over. The people started to collect around the sawdust circle. Suddenly I heard the song of wrestling, called “Sachidao” in Georgia. I saw four persons (then I observed that they were the ethnic Azerbaijani from the neighboring village) who were playing “Sachidao”. They have instruments such as: Zurna, Duduki and Doli. The celebration was started. The person with the horn (‘rupor’) claimed the names of the fighters (wrestlers) and the villages which they represented. The first fighters (wrestlers) were kids, then the age of the fighters and weight was growing. The fans were crying when their favorite fighter lost or won. There were three referees from neighboring ethnic Georgian villages. Half an hour later, some people brought tables and chairs for the organizers from Dagestan (citizens of Russia). They were not only the organizers of the wrestling celebration, but also the people who gave monetary rewards to the winners. The monetary reward was 100 and 200 dollars for the first place. They gave 100 dollars to the winner if he was from the neighboring village [i.e. ethnically Georgian or Azerbaijani], and they give 200 dollars to the winner if he was ethnic Dagestani. As an exception the organizers gave 100 dollars to the wrestlers (only if he was represented from Village Tsodna, i.e. he was ethnic Dagestan) if he took the second place. Several hours later when wrestling was started a truck came and stopped at the place where I was standing. I decided to climb on to the truck to better see wrestling. In a few seconds the truck was full of people. Suddenly I saw that there were wine bottles and several cauldrons in the truck. I realized that there would be feast after the celebration.

During the wrestling celebration which lasted all day long, a lot of people were selling food, cigarettes and drinks (chocolates, mineral waters, popcorn, Coca-Cola, Fanta). One man from the neighboring village brought a self-made construction for games. A lot of kids enjoyed playing it and at the end of the day the man earned some money. One of the sellers told me that it was her first time in this field. She knew from her friend from Village Tsodna in bazaar that on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August there would be the wrestling celebration and a lot of people. Therefore, one saleswoman decided to use this situation and sell some food, cigarettes and etc.



*“People are watching wrestling and staying here in the field all day long. Look around! Can you see any markets? Only field, trees and hills are around. Someone needs to take care of their stomach.”*

I was also very hungry and bought some snickers and water, the price was high then it was in the village booth market, but I have no choice. The celebration was finished in five hours. The people went to their houses and I went with my host. On the way I asked one of the wrestlers: - What kind of meaning does participation in the village celebration - wrestling have for you?

*“-You know, I am from Dagestan. If you live there you need to be a sportsman, a policeman or a pensioner. As you see I am sportsman. My grandfather, my father and their ancestors live here in Village Tsodna. Do you know that they were exiled from this land several times? We are proud to struggle here! Of course I am not going to stay here for more than two or three months, but I am not going to lose my roots and the old house. It is quiet and the nature and natural food are wonderful here. It is very difficult to find such things in Russia. So, we have a big reason to come here every year. If we do not come, then who will struggle instead of us?”*

Opening the border between Georgia and Russia makes it possible to celebrate wrestling. Wrestling is a way of life for Dagestani and it is one of the reasons for them to cross the Russian-Georgian border. Wrestling symbolizes identity, masculinity and power. According to Radu (2010:414) “those people living on the border have constantly put a stronger emphasis on crossing the border, transgressing their places of dwelling in a way different from integrating their life better within their given environment. In a way they have tried to flee from their places, imagining their life of events as a becoming in an ambiguous relation to their past and future.” The celebrating wrestling and crossing border through Kazbegi Zemo Larsi for Avars is one of the ways to remember ancestors and their roots. Such event as wrestling is a significant tool to form identity.

## Chapter Four

### Economic Links and Kinship Relations

*“Borders and frontiers are also elements in the transforming Dimensions of culture, politics, society and economics at every level of social and political complexity, experience and expression across the globe”.*

(Donnan, Wilson 2012:2)

This chapter is touching economic and kinship relations between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians. In this chapter I am going to focus how people from different identity and culture becoming friends. I will show that persons from the village Tsodna are not diverse and closed (as it was shown in chapter three), to neighboring villagers but they are linked and opened instead. I will write how economic and social situation makes links between different people from different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. Following sections illustrate personal relationship between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians.

#### **Bazaar: a place to exchange goods and experiences**

In this section I am going to write about Bazaar which is a place where different ethnic groups sell or buy goods. Also it is the place of meeting people, sharing their knowledge, helping each other and becoming friends. It is a place where persons create networks. Bazaar is much more feminine place, then masculine; mostly women are selling or buying goods. It is the place for Avar woman when they have ‘chance’ to find a paths with ethnic Georgian woman.

Near the village Tsodna and Vera is the Bazaar which is in ‘neutral zone’ of the village Tsodna and the village Vera. Every Sunday people are coming from different villages for trade; It is the place where people from different culture and tradition presents/sells/buys products; The Bazaar is the place where people exchange their goods, agricultural and cattle-breeding knowledge and experiences. Step by step people in the Bazaar create new networks, becoming friend. Itself

“...networks are the very substance of border life, while border life is itself an essential ingredient in the history” (Donnan and Wilson 1999:8).

During my six month fieldwork I had visited several times Bazaar. Normally Bazaar is every Sunday. People are starting coming in bazaar early morning at six o'clock. During my participation in bazaar as the person who wants to buy something I had small conversations with sellers. I discovered that people who were in the Bazaar were from the neighboring villages. Mostly they were ethnic Georgians. Minorities were ethnic Azerbaijanis and Dagestanis. They were several peoples from the village Tsodna. Some of them (mostly women from the village Tsodna) were selling cheese, and sheep (mostly men sell sheep). I felt that all of participants in Bazaar were hurrying, asking prices, choosing goods and etc. There was everything what person needs for village life. People were selling as clouds as animals like sheep, horses, cows. One day when I was walking in Bazaar I saw one woman from the village Tsodna. She was selling cheese. I decide to have small interview with her. Her name was Asher, she was 50 years old lady. I had several questions which I asked her. I was interested in how long she was selling cheese or other things in bazaar? Who helped to find place (i.e. place in cabin) to sell cheese. How often she was selling cheese? What kind of relationship she had with neighboring cheese sellers who were from neighboring ethnic Georgian villages? What kind of experience she got in Bazaar?

*“-You know every Sunday I am standing at five o'clock morning, reading to come here. During all week I am doing cheese and collecting to sell it in Bazaar. Now it is good weather, but when it is cold and rainy days it is very difficult to stand here from six o'clock morning until I did not get money what my family needs. If I was rich I did not stand here... who wants to be here? No one, but we need to sell something, because we need to buy something for family, for animals. If you did not care to the animals, they did not give you milk.”*

-How long and how often are you participating in Bazaar as seller?

*“-It does depend... If cows are giving milk which would be enough for family and for selling, then I sell cheese, If not we are eating at home. Sometimes dealers are coming in village by car and taking cheese. They are paying a little bit cheap then it is selling price in Bazaar, but it is better, because they are coming front of our house and taking all of cheese what we have, so I get less money but I am tired less.”* [During my six month fieldwork I hear several time signal of

car. It was mostly every Friday. One day the car was front of my guest house. I had small conversation with driver. He said me that they (he and his friend) were buying cheese from the villagers Tsodna and were selling it in Tbilisi (capital of Georgia). They know the families in the village Tsodna who were selling cheese].

-You always sell cheese or something else in Bazaar?

*“-Old times our women [i.e. women from the village Tsodna] were selling some clouds, goods. Old time we did not have so many cows to sell cheese. We were going house to house to neighboring villages and asking if they wanted to buy some dress or some goods. We know a lot of families from neighboring villages, we have very good relationship. Sometime some families did not have money to pay, and we have so good relationship that we trust them and gave goods and they were giving us money later.”*

- As I see now with you some ethnic Georgians (I realize that they were ethnic Georgians through their language and visual. Dagestani women wears dress and they have scarf on hat, but mostly ethnic Georgian women are not wearing scarf every day) are also selling cheese in the Bazaar. You know them? She smile and call the women who was selling cheese near her. Asher smiley asked her.

- *Iamze, what kind of relation we have?*

*“-We are friends Asher, you do not know? Poverty friends, who are looking to earn some coins for family.”*

*“-There are some days in the Bazaar, when some of us did not earn some money, then we are borrowing money from each other. This is our life, one day I have money and another day she, but the main think in our life is not money, and the main think is our friendship and good relationship. We need to help each other.”*

Economic relationship between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians has a long history; old time women from the village Tsodna were selling goods house to house in neighboring villages. Bazaar is a place for trade, but for persons who are selling goods it is a place where they create networks, becoming friends, sharing experiences. Bazaar is a feminine place, where every Sunday women (who are selling goods) are meeting each other. Asher’s and Iamze’s good

relationship is one of the examples which express how people from different ethnic groups are helping each other.

### **From door to door: goods from friends to friends**

In this section I am going to write about the economic links with Dagestani living in the village Tsodna and with ethnic Georgians. I am going to explain the economic links of the villagers of the village Tsodna out of the Bazaar. I am going to write about the sellers, who are selling goods in villages and also in the village Tsodna.

During my fieldwork I met several sellers (ethnic Georgians and only once ethnic Turks) who were going from door to door, offering to the Dagestani families their goods. I saw that kind of sellers several times in my host family. One morning in September, I heard the voice of man who was shouting: “*water-melons, water-melons*”. My hosts called him, and he stopped his carriage of horse front of our house. My host and I went out. Person who was selling water-melons was being called Davit. Davit and Murad greeted one another. I realized that they knew each other. After few minutes, Murad asked for the price of the water-melons.

Davit answered:

-“*For you my old friend it would be 25 Lari (Georgian money) whole carriage*”. Murad smiled and said: -“*I can give you cheese which is worth 20 Lari’s, but you know my cheese is good and you cannot find it in Bazaar; look your water-melons are small*”

-“*They are small but sweet, but ok, I know you are kind person and I am not going to trade with you. Where can we put water-melons?*”

After that Davit and I started discharging carriage. When we finished our job, Murad called us and said, now let’s have a breakfast. We were sitting around the table eating and communicating. I asked them how long they knew each other and how they met. Davit said that it was long time ago, when he was buying sheep from Murad. After that, they are friends from neighboring villages. I asked Davit how often he was selling water-melons from door to door and if he was selling in Bazaar. He responded: “*I have already sold water-melons in Bazaar, but I know that in the village Tsodna are living mostly pensioners . Look at Murad, how he can buy so much*

*water-melons in Bazaar? He cannot even bring it in his house. Because of this I am selling them here in the village Tsodna from door to door.”*

After the breakfast, Murad gave four kilograms of cheese to Davit and old friend left the house. Next person who was selling goods from door to door was Nina. She was also from the village Vera. I met her two times. Once she came in August in my host family. That time she was selling knives, spoons and some goods for kitchen; and second time at the end of December. Nina is a friend of. One evening in December Nana came to my host house. She brought some goods for New Year. Everyone was very happy to see her. She (Nina) was taking several types of horses and New Year caps from her bag. Zeinab chose some goods and after that she started making coffee for her guest. I realize that both of them were very happy to see each other.

I think selling goods from door to door is not just for earning money and it has much more meaning for those people who are selling or buying goods. People as Davit and Nina get more than money; they get friends from the village Tsodna. Also families who are buying goods from them, they get friends from neighboring villages. I think this is one of the simple but very important examples how people from a different villages (in this case the village Tsodna and the village Vera) create networks between each other.

### **Artisans from neighboring villages**

In this section I am going to write about artisans in village Tsodna. Mostly they (artisans) were from neighboring villages. In village Tsodna after opening the Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, natives started building new houses or rebuilding old ones. During my six month fieldwork I had seen only a few persons (natives) in the village Tsodna, who were doing artisan work for their houses. All artisans were ethnic Georgians from neighboring villages. I decide to collect more information about relations between native (i.e. from the village Tsodna) and artisans from neighboring villages. I had several questions; I was interested to get knowledge why in the village Tsodna was working only ethnic Georgian artisans and not ethnic Dagestani? What was the reason of that? Were ethnic Georgians better artisans then ethnic Dagestani? Was it cheaper for family to pay for an artisan job to ethnic Georgian rather ethnic Dagestani? How natives knew who good artisan was, and how they got their contacts? Since when ethnic Georgian had worked in the village Tsodna?

From July until October I met several artisans who were building houses in the village Tsodna. One of such artisan from the village Chala was working in my host house. His name was Alika. He was 57 years old. As he told me he had graduated from faculty of civil-engineering. During Soviet Union he had good job, but after collapse of Soviet Union he start working as an artisan. Murad and Alika are friends since 1990s. They met each other in Bazar, and now they are *Konags* (It is old term of very close friend. See next section). Their children are also friends. If Murad needs to build something in his house he is calling to Alika. Alika is not doing only job of artisan, he is also working as black-worker in the village Tsodna. When I met him first time he was cleaning cow-house. Second time he came in September and he was grinding wall of house and wall of bath room. I added some questions on which I was interested to get answers.

- A lot of families are building houses in the village Tsodna; was it the same situation several years ago?

*-Of course no. Before the opening of Border, they were living very poor. A lot of houses were destroyed and abandoned. Last year [i.e. in 2012] one man which came from Dagestan started to rebuild his house; when his neighbor saw it he also decided to rebuilt his house and so people from the village Tsodna started rebuilding houses.*

- I saw in the village Tsodna that all artisans who are working here are ethnic Georgians. Why is it like this?

*- It has several reasons. First of all I remember old time, when we [i.e. ethnic Georgians from the neighboring villages] had money and good life they [i.e. ethnic Dagestani from the village Tsodna] were building our houses, helping us, and collecting grapes. Nowadays we [i.e. ethnic Georgians from the neighboring villages] are poor and they [i.e. ethnic Dagestani from the village Tsodna] have financial abilities, so we have to work for them. Second reason is that they became lazy. I remember old times when they [i.e. villagers of the village Tsodna] were working very hard, but now they have money from Russia. They get big pension from Russia and their sons are living in Russian federation, so they have money and when they are coming here for two-three months they just want to rest. Third reason is that all good artisans from the village Tsodna mostly are in Russia, they are working there. Forth reason is that we are working harder and cheaper; for example if their [i.e. ethnic Dagestani] men make this work for one month, we [i.e. ethnic Georgians] are doing same job just in one week.*

-How inhabitants of the village Tsodna knows who is artisan and who is not? How they get your contacts?

*-Our villages are small; we all know each other or someone who knows someone. For example, in my case, Murad knows that I am artisan, if someone from the village asks him of course he will give my number; then I will get new contact and so on.*

Alika was working in my host family more than a week. He was coming every day early morning and working very hard until evening. Relationship between Alika and my host family was very good. It was not just relationship with tenant and with employed person; It was relationship of friends.

During my fieldwork I saw Alika several times; he was doing artisan work for other families of the village Tsodna. As I discover in the village Tsodna there were working four groups of artisans. Only Alika was working alone and if he needed help he was calling his son.

According to my ethnographic data materials, I think that opening border between Georgia and Dagestan (Russian federation) affected the economic situation of the villagers of Tsodna. It is also visually visible when you are in village. Abandoned and old houses are now full of people (Dagestani who are coming for summer holidays in Georgia from Dagestan); Houses are rebuilt. The fact that in the village Tsodna people start building and rebuilding houses also affected the salary of artisans; This made it possible for the artisans from the neighboring ethnic Georgian villages, to have a seasonal job and some salary during summer. Itself everyday relations of inhabitants of the village Tsodna and artisans from neighboring villages, make it possible to build new links and relationships.

### **Winter is coming: Buying the Firewood and Hay**

In this section I am going to discuss, how people from the village Tsodna are preparing for winter, and how they are linked with people who are selling firewood and hay. Peasants are preparing for winter during all summer. Families are collecting food, buying goods, buying flour to make bread and etc. One of the most important thing for the peasants of the village Tsodna is to prepare firewood and hay. All families who are staying in winter in the village Tsodna, are using 'Pechi' (Stove) to warm up their houses. Second most important thing which people in the



village Tsodna care about the winter is to collect hay. In case that people from the village did not have big grounds to collect hay, they are buying it.

There are mountains and forests all around the village Tsodna. In September I saw how people from the village Vake and Vera were going in forest and cutting down trees. I was wondering if someone from the village Tsodna was going in forest for cutting down trees. I asked my host about it. He told me that no one was cutting trees from the village Tsodna.

One evening two guys came in my host family. They were from the village Vera and looking for someone who wanted to buy firewood for winter. My host starts talking with them. They agree with price and date of bringing firewood. After one week same guys from the village Vera came with cars. They brought firewood to my host family. I started conversation with them (with my Murad and with guys from the village Vera). I asked:

- Murad, around the village Tsodna is forest same forest as it is for the village Vake and the village Vera. Why people are not cutting trees from the village Tsodna. Is it forbidden or there is some other reason?

*-Our [i.e. the villagers of the village Tsodna] boys are lazy. They did not want to work. Of course there are some rules written by government, which tells us that we can only cut some of trees, but we can cut it down. No one knows if someone cut trees at night. Our boys are lazy.*

The guys from the village Vera also entered the conversation.

*-Now they [i.e. ethnic Dagestani from the village Tsodna] have money. As my grandfather told me, in old times all people from the village Tsodna were collecting firewood for winter.*

*-[Murad] Yes, that is true. I remember that also women were collecting firewood for winter in forest. They were bringing firewood on their back, it was very difficult time.*

-How many families are buying firewood for winter?

*-[Boy from the village Vera]Everyone who is staying here, all families are buying firewood, in another case they would freeze in tough winter conditions.*

-How many families had already bought firewood from you?

- [Boy from the village Vera] *It would be seven or eight households. At this moment, when it is warm they do not buy firewood, because they think that they can get it cheaper after one month. But when it would be colder price of firewood would be much more expensive.*

- Only you are selling firewood or someone else?

-[Boy from the village Vera]*Now as I know only we are selling, because it is not a season for selling firewood, but after several weeks it would be more groups of people.*

During conversation boys from the village Vera asked to Murad if he was going to buy hay for winter. Murad has six cows and seventy sheep. He said that he needs two hundred ‘Tuki’ (‘Tuki’ is a box of pressed hay, which is 10-12 kg). Boys said that when it would be season of hay they can bring it. Murad and guys exchanged mobile numbers.

In October Murad called one of the guys and asked to bring hundred ‘Tuki’ at first. Price of one ‘Tuki’ was 3 Lari. Next day boys from the village Vera brought hundred ‘Tuki’. We all were putting ‘Tuki’ on the top of the cow-house. When we finished, Murad made dinner for all of us. I realized that people (i.e. Murad and those guys) were getting friends. They were talking only about the prices of ‘Tuki’ and firewood but also about the life in their villages, about the persons who they knew in villages, about their stories and etc. During conversation Murad said that his neighbor Ahmed also wanted to buy firewood and hay. After that we went to the Ahmed’s house. Ahmed and guys from the village Vera started conversation like it was in case of Murad when they met each other first time.

### **“We Are Konags”: Friendship without Ethnicity and Religion**

This section discusses one of the oldest kinship traditions in Caucasus region called *Konagoba*. *Konagebi* (*Konags*) are called two persons who are very close friends. According to my ethnographic data material, I am going to describe meaning of *Konagoba* for Avar people. How persons from different ethnic and religious groups find paths to each other, and how border politic affected the relationship between *Konags*.

*Konagoba* (kinship) is connected with hospitality, so *Konags* (friends) present two different villages. It ‘*სტუმარმასპინძლობა*’ (*stumarmaspindzloba*, rules of hospitality) is the holiest

tradition among Caucasians. There is written a lot of stories about rules of hospitality in Caucasus in Caucasian folklore. It is not important if guest and host knew each other before. There are a lot of stories in Georgian folklore, when person was hosting his enemy, but because ‘host is gift from the god’ no one touches guests in Caucasus. *Konagoba* is one of the central forms of hospitality and kinship. Still there are some people, mostly old generation who has/had *Konags*.

As I mentioned in chapter one and chapter two, during Soviet Union, a lot of people from Dagestan were trading in Georgia, in Kvareli region. They were coming in Georgia for several days or weeks. Ethnic Dagestani and ethnic Georgians were hosting them. According to my informants, that time they had several *Konags* from Dagestan; *Konags* were hosting each other same way in Georgia and in Dagestan. It is impossible to be *Konags*, from same village. *Konag* is a person who is not ‘your’ enemy. If person call each other *Konags*, they cannot fight with each other. *Konagoba* is masculine institute. In my view it is connected with the life style of Caucasian people, that man is breadwinner, who are traveling, selling goods, and women are those who are doing household.

During my fieldwork in the village Tsodna, I recorded life histories which are connected with *Konagoba*, one of them was Shahban's life history. I chose his interview because I met Shahban's ethnic Georgian *Konag*, who was helping him for building new cow-shed. Shahban is 75 old man; he is living in the village Tsodna with his wife. His children are living in Russian federation, who are visiting him every summer since 2012. His *Konag* is Dato, from the village Balgojani. Dato and Shahban are *Konags* from 1994. I was interested in how they became *Konags*? What kind of meaning has *Konagoba* for them?

- [Shahban] *“In 1990s, in Georgia was poverty. We [i.e. ethnic Avars] took flour from Dagestan through Azerbaijan in Georgia. One evening I was coming with my car which was full of flour back in the village. Near the village Vera, my car brake and I started fixing it. Suddenly the man came, saw that I had problem and said that he will come soon with his car and will help to bring flour until my house. We did not know each other before. After several minutes he came with his car and helped me. When we went to my house, I decided to give money for helping, but he did not take it and left the house. After several months I was in bazaar, and suddenly I met him again. We were very happy to see each other. He was selling watermelons. He said that I can take as much watermelon as I can for free. When he finished selling watermelons, I invited Dato*

*in my house. We had fiest, food and my home made wine. That time I had vineyard. When he looked around house said that he was artisan and he could renew my house. After that we became Konags. Everything: balcony, floor, walls in my house are renewed by him. When he finished his job I gave money but he did not take it, then I gave one sheep to him, and one I slaughtered to celebrate our friendship. After that we are Konags, if I need some help he is helping me, if he need some help I am helping. His son is also helping me, because I am his father's Konag.''*

*-[Dato] "It is no matter who is your Konag, he is Avar or Georgian, Muslim or Christian. Important is that he must be a good person, with clear heart. The persons are not becoming Konags in one day, it need several months or years of relationship. Time is best examiner of relationship. Real Konag is with you in joy and in trouble. We have been through many things, and we saw that our friendship is real. If there would be conflict between our villages, we never fight against each other because we are Konags; we will try to talk with our [i.e.Ethnic Georgians and ethnic Dagestania] people to define problems between our villages".*

Kinship in case of *Konagoba* is voluntary; people create system of friendship ignoring ethnicity and religion. *Konagoba* is masculine institute which is connected with everyday life of Caucasian people. *Konags* are friends who present on the one hand their families and on the other hand their villages. Persons who are *Konags* have function of mediators between their villagers. Everyday life examines if persons become or not *Konags*. In next section I am going to write about *Konags* who are shepherds from the villages Tsodna, Vake and Vera. They gather every day in a field and discussing about the everyday life of villagers, religion, history, and economics.

### **Shepherds: Tempered Friendship in "Restaurant"**

In this section I am going to focus on a group of people, who are shepherds from the villages Tsodna, Vake and Vera. Describing about their (Shepherds) everyday activity in field I will show how different ethnic groups find paths to each other; how people from different religious background create their own spaces and how they become *Konags*.

It was August, when I decided to go outside the village Tsodna and walk a little bit in field where shepherds were. Fields where shepherds take their sheep is in one kilometer from the village Tsodna. Usually shepherds leave their houses early morning and are going back in the evening, so all day long they are spending time in field. From my point of view, because of this, shepherds are somehow divided from everyday an activity which takes part in their villages. The field is surrounded by the forest. At noon, when it is very hot, sheep and shepherds are resting under the shadows of trees.

During my fieldwork I met group of shepherds, who were meeting each other every day in the field. In the group there were five persons; three of them were ethnic Avars from the village Tsodna and two of them ethnic Georgians from the villages Vake and Vera. Every day shepherds were gathering in same place under the shadow of tree, where they were eating, drinking, playing music, dancing, discussing about weather, sharing their life histories, discussing about government, prices in bazaar and etc. They call this place the 'Restaurant'. Irakli who is from the village Vera made wooden chairs; some ethnic Avars brought from their houses plates, dishes, and glasses. Every day shepherds make events in the 'Restaurant'. Ethnic Georgians Irakli and Temuri were bringing home made alcohol, and ethnic Avars were bringing food. From forest they were collecting wood to light the fire. After preparing some food, 'event in restaurant' had started. 'Tamada' (Georgian: თამადა. Toastmaster) was making toasts. First toast was always for nature, second for cattle, third for kinship, fourth for peace, after that shepherds were saying toasts to each other. Between toasts shepherds were playing and singing Georgian and Avar folk songs. Comparing their situation in past with present, they discussed politics.

Everyday activity such as taking sheep in the field makes it easy for ethnic Georgians and Avars to find path to each other. The 'Restaurant' is a place where persons from different religious background are gathering and sharing their knowledge and experiences. The 'Restaurant' is the place which is situated outside the villages ( Tsodna, Vera and Vake) and near the forest; so, it is outside the religious space, where drinking alcohol (see chapte three) is seen as a bad temper. The 'Restaurant' is a place where persons became *Konags*. 'Members of the 'Restaurant' are persons who create their own space, which is based on *Konagoba*, i.e. kinship, freedom of religion, and peace.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored everyday life of ethnic Avars living in Georgia near the Dagestan (Russian Federation) – Georgian border. As I outlined in the introduction the state border political changes affects on the ethnic minority. Their responses to changing central policies and border conditions provide an ideal opportunity to see how elements of the population not only respond to, but also actively constitute, the conditions of a border regime and sovereignty. In case of the form of comparative analysis of the state border political changes I showed how border changes affects on everyday life and make socio-cultural and economic changes of ethnic minority in Georgia. In this work, I had explored and analyzed how sociocultural changes among Avars in the village Tsodna affected by changing of the border politic and how ethnic minority find a place in an ethnically diverse and rapidly change society.

In this work I make comparative analyses of everyday life of ethnic Avars through the history. I examine how changing of regional politics of border affected on everyday life and made socio-cultural changes among ethnic Avars in Georgia. My comparison between the different historical periods (before the Soviet Union, during Soviet Union, and in 1990's) and different politics of border has shown that from 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1990, Avar villages in Georgia changed not only in terms of their demographics, ethnic and physical characteristics but also in terms of their social and economic characteristics which shaped the everyday lives of its inhabitants. This is mainly a result of macro political changes: First in 1944, during the Soviet Union, when Stalin forced population resettlements and, second, during the “restructuring or “perestroika” period on the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. My comparison also examines the relationships between ethnic Georgian and ethnic Avars; from 1944 to 1990 relationships between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Avars were rapidly changed. If during Soviet Union relationships were based on loyalty and trust between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians, they were changed in 1990s, when ethnic Georgians from the neighboring villages started demonstrations against Avars. As I have argued one of the main actors in this process was Georgian government (in 1990) and it's politics.

In chapter three I have explored how socio- cultural changes as a consequence are connected with the opening the border between Georgia and Russia in 2010. I have discussed about new

processes as symbolizing power and identity which arise after the opening of the border. My comparisons of my ethnographic data material, which was collected in 2008, 2009 (when the border between Georgia and Russia was closed) in the village Tsodna, with my ethnographic data material which was collected in 2013, made me argue that after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border new socio-cultural processes had started in the village Tsodna. I have explored that Avars' everyday activities and rituals such as cutting down vineyards, building new mosque, changing wedding ceremonies, celebration of village with wrestling, which took a part in the village Tsodna after the opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border, are tools for persons to identify themselves as a 'good Muslim' and a part of Muslim society. I have argued that opening Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border is one of the central 'actor' among many other actors which make socio-cultural changes among Avars in the village Tsodna. I have suggested that the reason of ongoing new processes in the village Tsodna is connected with an increasing number of religious people (mostly young generation) in the village. In last section I have mentioned about the cultural boundaries in case of conflicts between the villagers of Tsodna and Vake. The reason of conflict is religious disputes, which started after the opening of Kazbegi Zemo Larsi border. I have examined that religious conflict has deep roots and it is connected with senses as hearing and seeing. I have argued that one of central role in the religious conflict is playing new technology, such as big speakers, which is used during Azaan.

I have argued that there are different cultural diversity which makes borders and social separation between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians. For example, different religions (on the one hand Muslim society, on the other hand Christian society, language (Avar and Georgian), and history, but people still are creating networks between each other. In last chapter I have examined economic and kinship relations between ethnic Avars and ethnic Georgians. I have focused how people from different identity and culture becoming friends, creates network and find paths to each other. I have argued that the economic and social situation links people and make them friends. An everyday socio-economic activity makes it easy for ethnic Georgians and Avars to find path to each other.

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**Illustrations**



map of the village Tsodna



Way from the village Tsodna to the Adalai Mountain.



Way from the base of Georgian military to the Adalai Mountain.



View from the hill.



Wrestling



Ethnic Azerbaijani are playing music during the wrestling



people are looking at wrestling



Old villager in his vineyard



'Marani' \_ Kvevri, bottle of wine and some tools for making wine and vodka



Worker in the vineyard from a neighboring village





New perspective of vineyards: sheep in the vineyard



Mosque inside the cemetery



cemetery  
dead body



place of ritual washing of a



Mosque is divide two parties: part inside the curtain is for women and other part is for men



Handmade Minbar and 'Pechi' (Stove) inside the Mosque



Kurban Bairam ceremony, people pray together and share sweets.



Going to bazaar for trade.



Selling water-melons from door to door in village Tsodna



shaping wall in the village Tsodna



Same houses. 1<sup>st</sup> picture I took when I was first time in the village Tsodna in 2009 and second in 2013.