

Islamic revival in Georgian – Chechen border Area



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Introduction:

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union all the former Soviet countries have been going through changes in social and religious life. Muslim states strongly tied their identities to Islam while countries with a majority of Christians started to tie their identities to the Christian religion. Georgia is a country with a majority of Christians and therefore a religious revival of the orthodox Christian religion has taken place. There are several groups of people though (Chechens (Kists), Azerbaijanis, Dagestanians) who represent Muslim minorities in the country. Focus of the thesis will be the processes of religious and social changes the Chechen Muslim minority community in Pankisi valley has undergone after dissolution of the Soviet Union and state building process in Georgia. More precisely, it will address what the religious situation is currently in an area of Georgia settled by Muslim Chechens and the connections and interactions they have with their neighboring ancestor Chechens in Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union processes of religious renewal in Chechnya had significant influence on the Kist community in Georgia. In this thesis I would like to explore the Muslim religious renewal in the Pankisi valley. Questions relating to how the religious renewal expresses itself and how it developed and continues to develop in the Pankisi valley will be the major research focus of this thesis.

The Pankisi valley, mostly inhabited by Kists considered as descendants of Chechens has been considered as the hot spot in Georgia, especially during the period at the turn of the century from the end of the 90s to the beginning of two thousands. Pankisi Gorge came under international attention after instabilities in the northern Caucasus and the wars in Chechnya across Georgia's borders with the Russian Federation. The second Russian-Chechnya war in 1999-2009, (the first war was in 1994-1996 and ended with Chechnya's de facto independence which was reverted by second war) resulted in a flow of refugees from Chechnya who settled in the bordering Georgian territory of Pankisi Gorge. Both Georgian and international media have since reported on drug trafficking, arms smuggling and kidnappings taking place in the region. It was also suspected by Georgian authorities and reported by the media that Pankisi had become part of a network of Islam fundamentalists and terrorists. However, my aim here is not to add to the at times speculative literature and media debate on terrorism and border security in Pankisi Gorge. Indeed, the Pankisi Kists did not receive special attention, neither from the international nor the Georgian community, before the war in Chechnya

broke out in 1999. Most of the Georgian historical, ethnographic and political literature about Pankisi was published after the war broke out but there are ethnographic studies about the life and traditions of the Kists, written by local Kists themselves (Leila Margoshvili and Khaso Khangoshvili, among others), that predate the war. At the beginning of the 21st century different political, ethnographical and historical studies have been done by several Georgian scholars, too.

Pankisi Valley and Duisi village

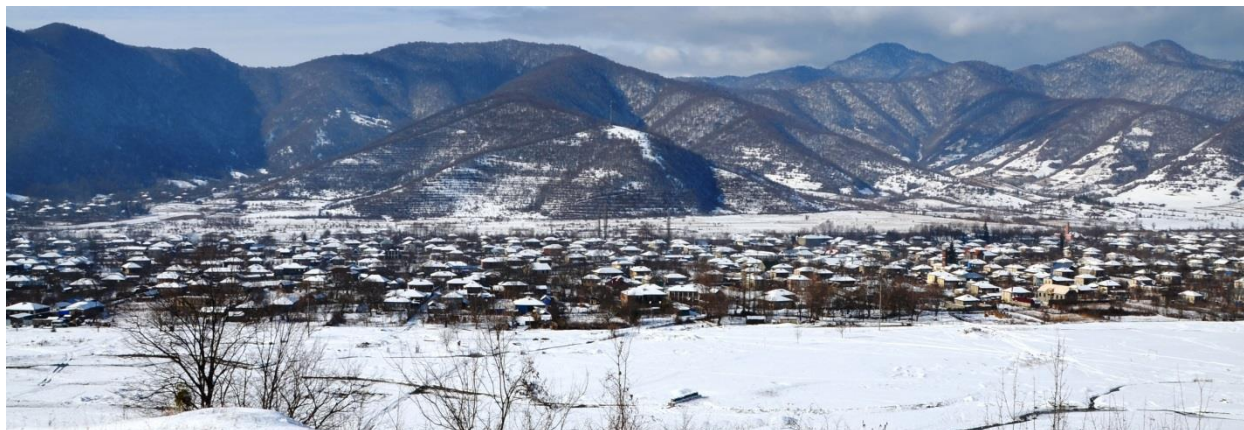
Pankisi Gorge, also known as Pankisi Valley, is located in the Northeastern corner of Georgia south of the Georgian-Chechen border in the district of Akhmeta, in the province of Kakheti. Today, most inhabitants of Pankisi Gorge are Kists that are considered to have Chechen origins. Kists together with Chechens and Ingushetians share the ethnonym “Vainakh”¹. By the end of the 19th century Kists settled in the territory. Chechens immigrated to Georgia from north Caucasus. To migrate from Chechnya to Pankisi Gorge, Chechens had to cross through the Tusheti mountains of Georgia. The immigration of Kists was caused by the difficult political and economic conditions in Chechnya-Ingushetia and by the problem of blood feud.

Chechen inhabitants in Pankisi call themselves Kists. Georgian inhabitants also identify Pankisian Chechens as Kists. Historically, Chechens had cultural or economical relationships with Georgian neighboring mountain people – Tushetians and Khevsurians. There are different Georgian narratives and stories about why Pankisi Chechens are identified as Kists. The Georgian ethnographer Khaso Khangoshvili argues against the opinion that Kist is the Georgian exonym. Instead he argues that “Kisteti” was the Chechen neighboring area of Khevsureti and Tusheti. Chechens and Ingushetians had therefore been identifying by Khevsuretians and Tushetians as Kists and that the term was then adopted by Georgians (2005: 25). To avoid any confusion I will in this thesis use Kist to refer to Chechens who migrated to Georgia two centuries ago and who now live in Pankisi Gorge. I will use “Chechen” to identify Chechen people living in Chechnya.

¹ collective name for Chechen and Ingush people

Kists mainly migrated to the valley at the end of 19th century, however some of the families started living in Pankisi earlier. Khangoshvili gives the example of a man named Dui from the Dishni clan. He escaped the blood revenges in Chechnya. He first joined another Maisti clan in Chechnya with his close relatives but later he moved to live in Pankisi valley, after obtaining permission from the local government, together with his relatives and some other people from Maisti. (Khangoshvili 2005: 279-281) Later the village was called Duisi. Today the village is the home of more than 10 clans who originated from the Maisti or Dishni clans.

Duisi has been the biggest village in Pankisi Valley compared to other villages inhabited by Kists. The village is often referred to as the center of Islam by the people from other villages and by Duisians themselves. Being a center of Islam, means that Islam has always been the major religion in the village while in other Kistian villages there have also been people who practiced Orthodox Christianity. Being a center of Islam also means that the renewing of Muslim values and Islamic practices in the valley has first taken place in Duisi. The most visible manifestation of Duisi being the center of Islam is the mosque that was built 1902 in Duisi and which is the first mosque in the valley; Mullahs from Daghestan or Chechnya travelling to Duisi to teach Islam; and a few Duisians who managed to travel to Mecca. Duisi has been the only village where, before, during and after the Soviet Union, one could find two (later after 1970s even three) Sufi tariqas (in other villages there is commonly only a Qadiriyya tariqa of Sufism) and, of course, Duisi was the center for the debate about the role of Islam in society and the concerns with “correct” Islam which evolved during and especially after the 1990s. Locals also use the phrase the “civilization center” when they refer to Duisi. The “civilization center” might mean that new ideas in general have found a fertile ground in the village. Such novelties might be within the field of religion but also in education and in other cultural fields. Indeed, the first secondary school in Pankisi Gorge was established in Duisi in the beginning of 20th century. During the Soviet times there were film screenings in the “village club” (as it is called by the people in the village) in the center of the village. There is even a small ethnographic and archeological museum at the end of the village.



Picture of Duisi village

Today there are eight villages in the Pankisi valley that are inhabited only by Kists. (Duisi, Jokholo, Birkiani, Omalo, Khalatsani, Dumastori, Tsinubani, Omalo and Dzibakhevi). The second biggest village in the valley is Jokholo. Jokholo is a village which was also founded early (some people claim it was the first village founded by Kists, others claim Duisi and Jokholo were founded more or less at the same time).

Jokholo has been considered to be Duisi's opposite in terms of the position of Islam in the village. Pagan beliefs of Jokholo inhabitants became mixed with Christianity after they settled in the Valley in the 19th century. In 1888 a church was constructed in the village and many people, encouraged by missionary activities were baptized and became Christians. Before and throughout the Soviet times Jokholo was considered to be a more Christian village.

Duisians and Sufi Islam

Several local scholars from Duisi have written about religion in the village (Albutashvili 2005; Margoshvili 1985; Khangoshvili 2005). They mainly discuss how Sufi tariqas (Naqshbandi and Qadiryya) were established in the village and how they were embraced and practiced by Kists living in the village.

The Naqshbandi tariqa of Sufism evolved in Chechnya in the late 18th century. Sheikh Mansur is considered to be the first Naqshbandi imam who was fighting against the Russian military forces. Khaso Khangoshvili (2005) in his book *"Kists"* argues that in the fourteenth and fifteenth century

Islam started to spread in the north Caucasus under the influence from Iran and Turkey. Massive conversion began in the late 18th and in the 19th century during the leadership of Imams Mansur and Shamil as well as prominent Daghestani Imams.

Mate Albutashvili has written a fascinating ethnographic description of the Pankisi valley. He was born in 1863 and therefore he witnessed the expansion of Islam in the valley. He was a Kist, born in the village of Jokholo. He himself was a Christian; moreover he was the priest in Jokholo. Therefore he was able to describe Sufi Islam in Duisi from quite an “outsider's” perspective. Albutashvili writes that in 1905 “a bunch of mullahs” came from Grozny (Chechnya) and started to “establish a sect” (2005: 161). I surmise from Albutashvili's writings that Qadiriyya tariqa was the first that spread in the village.

Albutashvili writes that Murids¹ used to walk all the way up and down in the village, reciting “la ilaha ilallah”. “They had ceremonies everywhere: in the mosque, outside, on the fields or in the houses. And they call this *zikr* (Dhikr)”. Albutashvili also explains how the *zikr* was done: “They are moving around in a circle in the mosque or in the mosque yard; they are clapping and glorifying Allah”.

Very soon after, around 1909, another Sufi order established itself in the village. It was brought from Azerbaijan by Is Efendi, who was himself from Dagestan. Is Efendi introduced Naqshbandi tariqa into the village. Some of the people who used to be Qadiriyya murids shifted to the Naqshbandi order. Their *zikr* is done in a dark place, where “they sit in a circle but they do not clap”. Albutashvili claims that one sect became associated with Chechnya and the other with Daghestan. During Soviet times both the mosque in Duisi and the church in Jokholo were closed. As in other Soviet areas religion was abolished from the public sphere. However, Sufis in the village did not stop gathering and performing *zikr* in “room for Ziyarat” (As they call a small square building) next to the mosque or in private houses.

Fieldwork in Duisi

Methodology

Fieldwork in Duisi village lasted for six months (From the beginning of July until the beginning of January). Duisi is the biggest Kist populated village in Pankisi valley. Village is often considered to be the “center” by Kists from Duisi as well as from other villages. “Center” in this context means education or religious center (see introduction) Duisi is the main site for congresses and gatherings to debate different kinds of problems in the valley (disputes of “council of elders”, “committee of women” as well as the disputes of Jamaat court).

My host family I spent 6 months with represented different generations which were quite helpful for my research since I could observe and learn about generational differences in everyday life that is quite pivotal for my thesis. I started my fieldwork simply having conversations with family members and follow their rhythm of life by doing this I tried to learn how to communicate with people. To embody knowledge (even though down I will claim that I had a lot of knowledge already embodied when I went to the field), seeing things how people saw, understand people and communicate in their “language” was a long and unfinished process I tried to achieve by observing and participating in people’s daily life . As Timothy Jenkins states that main propose of fieldwork is “acquiring habits of action for coping with reality. He claims that ethnographer while doing her fieldwork should be able to acquire “embodied” and “nonverbal” knowledge which is most sufficient and reliable way to gaining the knowledge about the community. Jenkins explains that there are some activities in communities which takes place in people’s daily life, which are so natural that natives do not think about why or how it is happening. Therefore, questions of the ethnographers around these kinds of issues might make no sense for the people; after all, informants might not have helpful answers for the researchers. Jenkins refers to the Burdieu and claims that such activities are understood, learnt and employed bodily. “Practical mastery is transmitted in practice without attaining the level of verbal discourse” (Jenkins 1994: 439). The job of the ethnographer is to embody the local knowledge to be able to find the way how to ask the question to get proper answers.

Living with a Kist family was very helpful in the process of knowledge embodiment since I could participate in daily activities. Moreover, together with family members I was often engaged by different events (funerals, weddings). What mattered greatly, living with a family and attending the

different events together with family members helped to be perceived more “insider” by locals, therefore they often could be quite informal and familiar in relationship with me. Being and living in a family almost meant belonging to the family and the clan. Seeing me stranger walking in the village, locals instead of asking me who I were, would ask me *vistana xar?* (Which to translate from Georgian literally means “whom are you with?”). After My respond that I were “with” a certain family could create quite an informal conversation about, for instance, family members (mainly about how good people they are) friendly Attending various events together with family members meant to be a participant in events because I was associated to a family that was making me familiar, more “insider”. Events that I was attending alone, sometimes, could turn my position in the village from more “insider” to “outsider” when I would be mainly associated to Journalist (even if I would try hard to explain that I was ethnologist/anthropologist).

Being Participant as a women researcher

I tried to experience local people’s life by wearing the clothes; young girls in the valley are wearing. I used to mostly wear headscarf, long dresses. Time by time I was participating in the women daily activities and used to help my hostesses, for instance, to set a table. Sometimes when family had a visitors my position a guest could have changed and sometimes, I would become a hostess myself when I would help other women to set and then serve a *supra* (see chapter one). Besides that, there were the moments when I thought participating on a field was interfering with researcher on a field and had difficulties to balance my insider and outsider position in the village. People in the village could perceive me often more like a local than the researcher and outsider therefore they expect the certain kind of behavior from me. Even though It was a great advantage for my fieldwork to be often perceived as local by people which was giving me a great chance to learn more about the local and acquire “embodied knowledge” (see above), It could, sometimes, also create difficulties for me as a researcher. As I was told many times by family members, I was first and foremost their guest, almost the part of the family; therefore they were responsible for my safety and well-being in the valley. If someone in the village would anyhow be offensive to me during my stay in the family, members of the family would be responsible to respond the offender. Therefore, in some ways, I used to strongly control myself from the behaviors that would not be proper for the young Kist woman. Sometimes, I had to restrict myself from certain actions that could be, for instance, walking alone in the evening

times when it was dark or getting dark (It was especially problematic in winter times when the day was short). Several times I got reminded by some locals that it was *ulamazo* (*not naive behavior*) for young girl to walk alone when it's dark. At the beginning of my fieldwork several of my interlocutors expressed their disapproval when in the evening time I said they didn't have to bother to accompany me to the house. They claimed that I was their guest and they were responsible to my safety till I would reach the house. I was also often discouraged to make independent trips to the closest hills (where the sacred places are situated) in the village. Being participant to that extent I experienced as quite a difficulty, however, again this experience might be common for many female anthropologists who deal with the strongly patriarchal societies. Problems female anthropologists are facing in such communities is discussed for instance in the book "Women in the field" by Peggy Golde.

Advantages and disadvantages of being woman researcher

Kist community is strongly patriarchal and the roles are gendered, therefore I used to mostly hang out with women interlocutors, have had conversations with them. However, again because of the gendered roles some women could consider themselves not knowledgeable and therefore unsecured and unsure to answer some of my questions. There have been cases when some women (especially the young) avoided my questions and told me that their husbands or brothers would give me the better and informative answers on my questions. Therefore, it is no surprise the main young interlocutors who discussed the topic of religion were men. However, those interviews mainly could be more formal but open ending (Although, I also managed to conduct informal interviews with men interlocutors of all generations). What is quite obvious to be counted as advantage of being a female researcher is that I could freely hang around and have conversations or interviews (formal or informal) with women in the village. What can be considered as disadvantage is that I was, at quite some extent, detached from a space of men and the main way to communicate with them were the interviews.

Fieldwork at "home"

Doing fieldwork at home often does not necessarily mean that the researcher is an "insider". Researchers in their own countries often choose a research problem or topic that they do not understand or which seems exotic and unusual. For instance, Georgian ethnographers mostly chose

the mountains or some rural, “traditional” areas to study life and traditions of communities. Besides the fact that I grew up in an urban society and did my field research in a rural society, I studied the ethnic community with a religion different from the one I was brought up in. Also, having had spent one year in Norway has helped me gain distance to some of the discourses and points of views that color the perception of other ethnic and socio-cultural communities within Georgia. However, still because of the fact that Kists have been living in Pankisi over two centuries and what greatly matters they have been significantly influenced by Georgian culture I already have had quite some knowledge “embodied” about the community I began to study. During the fieldwork I was keep realizing that there have been the issues I simply was not questioning, I was not describing and explaining enough simply because these issues were related to the culture I myself grow up. Valli Kanuha who also made a research in her home country describes the similar problem and claims how she didn’t ask her informants to describe various things or even sometimes wouldn’t “allow” to “complete sentences, thoughts, or descriptions because I knew implicitly what they were referring to in response to a particular line or questioning” (Kanuha 2000: 442) .

Borderland Pankisi

Borderland generally can be defined as the “zone of political, cultural, social, economic interactions of various peoples and societies”¹. Wilson and Donnan in their joint article (2012) claim that Anthropological ethnography “focuses on local communities at international borders in order to examine the material and symbolic processes of culture” (2012: 6). Borders have been interesting to study in order to examine how international borders influence on local culture. Borders also have been interesting to see “voluntarily and involuntarily movement of people across borders as traders, migrants and refugees” (Wilson, Donnan 2012: 7) and elaborate how this processes effect on the local culture.

After collapse of the Soviet Union starting the intensive interaction with Chechens greatly influenced the Kists local culture. As I will discuss below in the late eighties and especially after

¹ Seminar review (2013) of department of anthropology (University of California).

nineties Kists massively migrated to Chechnya to seek for jobs, after the second war broke out in Chechnya Kists, together with Chechens came to the valley as refugees. These migration processes had dramatic effect on local Kist community (which will be discussed below). Furthermore, in order to better understand Kists cultural context, I will also discuss how Kists could have been influenced by Georgian culture. In this thesis I hope to show how life in the valley is affected by the country they live in (Georgia), and the neighboring area they are originating from (Chechnya) as well as by Muslim, Middle Eastern countries after the fall of Iron curtain when the Soviet Union collapsed. Kists have been living in Georgia for two centuries, and have adopted traits from Georgian culture. During the Soviet Union Kists as well as other minorities were especially integrated with Georgian people. During Soviet times the villages that are today entirely inhabited by Kists were populated by Ossetians (migrated to Ossetia after collapse of Soviet Union, followed by the tensions between Georgia and south Ossetia) and Tushetians (gradually migrated to the other parts of Georgia). Different people in Pankisi valley used to live very friendly, moreover, It is claimed by Kists that “there was very little difference” or “there was no difference” between them and other people in the valley. Therefore, Kists were involved in the common Soviet lifestyle that often carried the characteristics of the Georgian culture (Meaning Kists started to adopt various Georgian customs related to food and drink, weddings and funerals). However, Kists to some extent have always been influenced by the religious situation in Chechnya, and after the dissolution of Soviet Union Kist identity became increasingly tied to the Islam that began to revive in Chechnya.

In the first chapter of this thesis I examine how Kist life may be affected by living in a borderland where they are settled in Georgia but have varying social, cultural and kinship ties with Chechens across the border in Chechnya (The Russian Federation). My Kist interlocutors refer to their relationships with the two countries as having both a motherland and a fatherland. What this means in social, practical and cultural terms will be explored in this chapter. neighboring

Chapter 1

Kists between the “fatherland” and “motherland”

Changing cultural and religious values in Pankisi Gorge are to some extent always linked to the borderland Chechnya from where Kists gain inspiration. As we will see in the chapter below in spite of the fact that Kists went through Soviet times without having much contact with Chechens, and even though Kists mostly did have contacts and relationship with Georgians and adopted some values from Georgian culture, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union a processes of Chechen religious renewal had its effects on Kist religious awakening.

Even though the border between Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge and Chechnya during Soviet times was merely an administrative and not an international state border as is the case today Kists did not have much contact with Chechens. Asmat – my main interlocutor, even talks about the isolation Kists experienced during the Soviet Union. She explains that everybody had jobs, and they couldn’t even conceive of moving to the different place. “They simply didn’t need to find other ways to live” – she says. Indeed, Kists worked together with Georgians or Ossetians in collective farms, so during the Soviet decades Kists mainly had relationships (friendship, collaboration, even marriages) with Georgians. Several young Kists in the valley pointed out to me the threat of assimilation with Georgians if Soviet Union had not collapsed, and the awakening of the Chechen national and religious sentiments had not taken place.

Indeed, generations that lived through Soviet times are significantly influenced by the Soviet lifestyle (see below) as we will discuss later in the chapters, one might find considerable difference between those who underwent Soviet times and those (the young generation) who didn’t. Therefore, before turning to a discussion of how Pankisians experienced their lives between “fatherland” and “motherland”, and how their lives have been affected by living “in between”, I’d like to define age categorization I will be using throughout this thesis. I will refer to my interlocutors and people in the village and the valley more generally by identifying them with the age categories “the young” and “middle aged” or “elderly”. Identifying and categorizing people as the young and middle aged or elderly is helpful in order to reflect how one’s life experiences have been shaped by the the political and economic features and the social and cultural values of the society one grew up in. Middle- aged and elderly people are those who went through (had been born and raised up) the Soviet times and

who are often labeled as “non-religious” by some of the young in the valley. By the young I mean those who have been raised in the post-Soviet times, during the awakening of religious sentiments in the valley.

“Motherland and Fatherland”

Kists often consider themselves to be the “children of two homelands”. Several of them have claimed that Kists are living “between two homelands”, therefore Kist community carry cultural characteristics of both homelands. Many identify Chechnya as their fatherland, the place of their roots and the place of origin of their *adat*¹. Georgia is often identified as the motherland as they share and are “fed” from the Georgian land and adopt the cultural aspects of the country.

One can often hear Kists (especially from those who are middle aged or elderly) say that they have preserved their ancestral (Chechen) traditions and *adat*, but that, they are *kulturuli* (Georgian word that can be translated as “cultured”) they have been encultured in Georgian way. Middle aged and elderly Kists sometimes even proudly claim that they kept the best from their ancestors (Tribal law and religion [Islam]) as well as the best they received from the Georgians.

In preserving Chechen *adat*, Kists usually mean following tribal law, and respecting the most important *adats* like the tradition of seniority (which means for the young to acknowledge the authority of and respect the elder), and the *adat* prescribing that member of the clans helping the needy in their clan, for instance during funerals, weddings, with building houses, farming or simply by giving material support like food and money.

Some Kists, claiming that they are preserving their ancestors’ *adat*, differentiate themselves from Georgian people, claiming that Georgians do not, or no longer, have the traditions that Kists consider it very important to abide by. They would for instance be critical of what they perceived as Georgians lack of respect in the interaction between people of different status relationships. Kists find it quite unacceptable that people with different statuses (young-elder, mother in law- daughter in law, father-son, etc) can treat each other as equals, and can talk, argue or joke like equals.

¹ Customs, traditions

Yet in spite of this criticism of Georgian's lack of respect of status differences, they draw on their Georgianness when comparing themselves with Chechens. They stress they are more "cultured", well-mannered or literate than Chechens and more like Georgians in this respect. The term "cultured" might also indicate that Kists consider themselves to be more tempered, patient, calm and cautious than Chechens who they often see as more impatient and reckless. Terms "cultured" or "non-cultured" is explained by Tone Bringa in the Bosnian context to refer to oppositions such as: "town versus village, educated versus uneducated, poor versus rich, modern and western versus backwards and Balkan" (Bringa, 1995: 58). Kists often describe themselves as more educated than Chechens. Some Kists believe that the deportation of Chechens for more than a decade (1944-1956), during the Soviet Union, left Chechens distressed and disconnected from civilization. Here, I will also point out that Kists strongly believe that living on Georgian land with Georgians protected them from deportation in 1944. Kists often express gratitude towards Georgians who, they believe, protected them from deportation. As way of explanation some Kists might invoke the idea of the "motherland": "They wanted to deport us too but Georgian people said we were brothers and sisters and they left us alone" – says one of the elderly. "Georgia protected us like her sons or daughters" – says another.

In being "encultured" in a Georgian way Kists often point out the *supra*¹ (Georgian word for table etiquette), wine drinking and toasting traditions that they adopted from Georgian tradition. Kists also believe they share same hospitality values with Georgians.

It should be noted, however, that Soviet policy could have had a "Georgianizing" or "enculturing" effect on Kists during the era of communism. I would attribute it to the influence of Soviet egalitarianism that empowered urban and rural people alike to gain education or to work without differentiating between nations.

Indeed, as also pointed out by Leila Margoshvili in her book, in the Soviet Union after World War II life in the Pankisi Valley changed rapidly and visibly: "Houses and way of furnishing changed a lot.

¹ Paul Manning defines Georgian *supra* as "feast, characterized by an extremely abundant display of traditional foodstuffs; at the same time *supra* is occasion for ritualized drinking, involving the consumption of large quantities of wine". *Sufra* is usually directed by *Tamada* – a toastmaster. *Tamada* must have special abilities of "consume large quantities of alcohol and speak eloquently" (Manning 2003: 1)

Schools were established in every village as well as libraries. Local people became teachers in valley schools. Kists, Georgians and Ossetians were working together in collective farms and created prosperity”. Even though the book was published in 1985 and is infused with Soviet propaganda when she talks about the bad traditions of Chechens her observation that collective inclusion in social and cultural life was encouraged during Soviet Union is corroborated by my sources through interviews and life-histories.

Nostalgia of Soviet times

Often middle aged and elder people nostalgically remember the early times in the Soviet Union and wistfully point out that life was much more peaceful and easy during that time. Georgians, Kists and Ossetians were living together friendly, like one people. People tell stories of how fun life was in the village, in schools and in universities. Often their best memories are related to the Soviet times. Middle aged men and women are the most open and free in their behavior in the valley. Both women and men are drinking in gatherings and saying toasts on a *sufra*. Usually men and women sit at separate tables, however, there have been occasions when women and men sat and toasted together.

A husband and his wife were recalling the early times and *sufras* when the husband started to joke about how much his wife could drink:

Husband: “She was drinking from a Khantsi” [a horn, used as a drinking vessel that is used in the ritual of toasting in Georgia] ... “She drank the others under the table”. (The husband said laughingly. (He literally said “she was making others fall and she would still continue drinking”) Wife: “No, he is lying ... I was forced to drink” - She replied and then continued – “well, I really could drink much”.

Kists often remember how close people were with each other in earlier times; how they knew their neighbors better and how open the people were with each other. “We knew all the good and bad of each other, we were together in bad and good times” says a middle aged woman. People remember the fun times neighbors were spending together and regretfully point out that today people prefer to be on their own and that there is not much sharing anymore. Some of them claim that people were

better in Soviet times; One used to be happy if something good was happening to someone else, and one used to be sad if something bad was happening to someone else. A middle aged woman – Asmat –claims that it has all changed now; people locked themselves within their own families and instead of being happy for one another they compete with each other and look for ways to be better than others. There is in other words a sense that the solidarity between people they remember from Soviet times have gone and been replaced by more competitive and individualistic values.

The collapse the Soviet Union – the end of quite times

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kists experienced mass migrations mostly to Chechnya but also to other parts of Russia. Kists mainly started to migrate because of economic distress in the valley as well as in the rest of the country. Even though borders were open in the regions within the Soviet Union Kists never experienced any significant Geographic mobility during the Soviet era. During the Soviet times some of the young Kists went to Chechnya (after Chechen repatriation)¹ to study but, as I was explained by people in the valley, many of them returned to the valley after their studies.

Before the Soviet Union collapsed Kists were not so familiar with Chechens and Chechnya. Chechnya was very “far from the hearts of the people” - one Kist says. As some of them claim, people simply didn’t think about or talk about Chechnya; “it was not in any way an interesting topic to talk about”—39 years old Lali explains. Another middle aged women even claims that Chechnya for her was like any other country outside Georgia, like Turkey or Azerbaijan. Sveta- also a middle aged women in her fifties claims that before the collapse of the Soviet Union she didn’t think she was anything else but Georgian.

During the economic hardship in Georgia immediately following the break-up of the Soviet Union and Georgia’s independence, many Kists left the valley to seek a job and better life conditions across the border in Russia and Chechnya. The economic distress in a new independent Georgia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union is remembered by Kists or Georgians (or any other people in the

¹ After Chechen repatriation in 1956 the late fifties, a special program was established for Chechens that encouraged Chechens to get an education. Furthermore, not only Chechens but also Kists could participate in the program.

country) as the “dark ages” which is characterized by frequent salary stops, severe power outages (that could last for days, weeks, months, and were most frequent in rural areas), food shortage, lawlessness and a general sense of chaos of the state not working; Closed down factories and a high number of jobless people. Kists remember that life conditions have been way better in Chechnya and that Chechnya in 90s was quite rich with the oil resources (they also often claim how rich Chechnya still is at the present day with the oil resources). Villagers claim that people in Chechnya have never experienced the same dreadful life and economic conditions as they and Georgians did. According to villagers after most of the Kists left for Chechnya to find jobs and seek better life conditions the village started to look like an abandoned, desolated area. Asmat jokingly says that if the war hadn't started in Chechnya, today it would be just her and a few other elderly people remaining in the village.

During the first war in Chechnya in 1994 some of the Kist migrants returned to the valley but after a short while some of this migrants went back again to Chechnya. A massive return of the Kist migrants to Georgia and the Pankisi valley took place in 1999, during the second Russian-Chechen war.

After 1999 the Pankisi valley hosted around ten thousand refugees from the war in Chechnya. People claimed it was estimated by the Georgian refugee council that at that time 70-80% of the people were Chechens and the rest were Kists. According to the report (2006) of the Human right center in Georgia (HRIDC) the number of Chechen refugees was approximately 8000 people. People recall that after the years of solitude and emptiness suddenly villages became crowded with people. Migrant Kists returned to their homes or to relative's homes if they didn't have a house anymore in the valley. Chechens were sheltered by the entire valley. They were accommodated in Kists' homes and each house received a number of refugees according to its size. According to some of the Kist families 10 or more Chechens used to live upstairs in their rooms. They claim that many of them gave the best part of their houses to Chechens; moreover some of the Kists left their rooms and moved to their kitchen. Many Kists have complained that Chechens didn't show much gratitude for Kists' help and hospitality. Some Kists claim that even though they spent years in Chechnya, they had never been hosted by Chechens (Here, some people might explain that Chechens are traditionally very hospitable. However, Chechens who live in a city (Grozny) are especially Russianized and therefore less hospitable). Kists believe that they are hospitable like Georgians, (some of them even claim that

their hospitality is influenced by Georgian culture, while other believe that they are even more hospitable than Georgians) while Chechens had become more like Russians. “Chechens are even more strange to me than Russians” – one Kist women claims “because you know about Russians, you know how different they are and you are not surprised - but Chechens? We speak the same language, we have the same faith, we are supposed to be the same people but they are so different”

This mobility, on the one hand Kists going as migrant workers to Chechnya, and on the other hand, Chechens coming into the valley as refugees, familiarized Kists with Chechens. The familiarization itself had different faces though. On the one hand, among Kists there was sympathy for as well as a sense of a shared ancestry and belonging with Chechen people. On the other hand Kists’ interaction with Chechens showed Kists that they are different, that they are not like Kists, that they are “others”, even though they both keep the same *adat*. Interestingly, Chechens and Kists “rediscovered” each other after the collapse of the Soviet Union when a new state border separated the two by citizenship and international border regimes. As suggested above Kists and Chechens didn’t have much contact during Soviet times and they didn’t know much about each other. There was a sense that Kists were “isolated” in the valley when there was no international state borders with Russia (and Chechnya), and it was, perhaps ironically, not until after a state border was established that Kists and Chechens started to interact and have regular interaction and close relationships such as friendships and marriages. A similar case of reconnection with each other and in the process a chance for comparisons of “our ways” and “their ways” producing a heightened sense of “the other” is reported by Mathijs Pelkmans (2006) in his book about a Lazian village on the border between Georgia and Turkey. In the book *Defending the Border*, Pelkmans discusses the village Sarpı in Georgia which was divided by the “iron curtain” when Soviet authorities established an impenetrable border with Turkey which split the village in two: half of the village remained on the Turkish side, while another on the Georgian side. Some of the people left families, relatives, jobs across the border. After the collapse of the Soviet Union when relatives met again, they found each other to be very different. Laz people living on the Georgian side were quite disappointed that Laz from the Turkish side didn’t respond to their abundant hospitality and claimed that they had become Turks, meaning more Muslim, while Sarpı on the Georgian side of the border who, of course, went through the anti-religious Soviet times were thought by their relatives and neighbors on the Turkish side to have become less Muslim. Pelkman’s case is a great example of how physical borders which divides a

community and prevents mobility and contact produce cultural and mental boundaries between people after living decades in different cultural and political spaces. However, what the Pankisi case shows is that an open or absence of a state or territorial border doesn't necessarily mean more contact and interaction than with the presence of a state border. In both the Pankisi and the Sarpi cases the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a change in border regimes. But while in the case described by Pelkmans people with kinship and ethnic ties reconnected after the softening of an international state border which again made visiting the other half of the village possible, in the Pankisi case Kists and Chechens started reconnecting and discovering difference between each other through close interaction after a new international state border -that between Georgia and Russia- was established where there had previously been merely an internal Soviet administrative boundary.

Being Kist, being a Muslim

Sonja Luehrmann in her book "Secularism, soviet style" (2011) uses the term elective affinity to describe the relationship between secularism and religion and explains the "shifting power" (2011: 17) between secular and religious institutions. Luehrmann questions Soviet secularism since the ideology sacralized the state and put the state authority on the place of god. Throughout the Soviet times the State was the one and only power that could take care of human beings and be the hope and guarantee of their safety and well-being (Luehrmann 2011). Religion was proclaimed to be an obstacle for human development and modernity. Instead of the "backward" and "pessimistic" nature of religion the Soviet authority offered a life full of optimism, hopes and promises for a better future. Luehrmann describes how sacred holidays or sacred places were replaced with profane ones by state authorities. She claims that "Soviet holidays were joyful and optimistic, inspiring creativity and confidence in the future" (2011: 7). Furthermore, "it was also accustoming people to social relations in which there were no significant nonhuman agents" (2011: 7). Luehrmann refers to the Bellah who uses the term "civil religion" to describe a state "that appropriates some of the set-apart character for its own symbols and rituals" and "placing itself at the center of its own" (Luehrmann 2011: 6). After the collapse of the Soviet Union when the state full of promises and hope was gone people reoriented themselves to god and religion and that is defined by Luehrmann as a "reorientation of hope" (2011:

17). After the collapse of the Soviet Union Kists, like other post-Soviet people, reoriented themselves to religion. In the following section I will start to discuss about how religious revival in Pankisi valley has expressed itself in a country with a majority of Christians (and which reoriented itself to Christianity after collapse of the Soviet Union). Mathijs Pelkmans who did his research in Ajaria, a mountainous region in southern Georgia on the border with Turkey suggests that the Christian faith has become “bedrock” of nationalist ideology in the post-Soviet area (2006:110). Ajarians, who are considered to be ethnically Georgians, converted to Islam during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and during the Georgian nation-state building process, many Ajarians converted back to Christianity and this process of (re)Christianization was encouraged by the Georgian state. Pelkmans discusses the link between nationality and religion after the dissolution of Soviet Union, and argues that being Georgian became strongly identified with Christian religion (Pelkmans 2010: 119).

Even though for many of the Kists Georgia is the “motherland” and they see themselves as “encultured” in a Georgian way (see above), Kists speak the Chechen language and have Chechen *adat*. One might claim that, during the nation building process in Georgia after its independence in 1990, Georgian state and nation became strongly identified with Orthodox Christianity and with being Orthodox Christian and Muslim Kists were thus excluded from the state-driven Georgian self-awareness process. Therefore, one could also claim that Kists reoriented themselves towards Chechens and Muslims. They went through a process of self-awareness after the collapse of the Soviet Union that linked them to their “fatherland” Chechnya across the border in Russia. Because of that, the religion related to their nationality remained or became (in the case of Jokholo) Islam.

Jokholo is an interesting example since the village has been considered to be more Christian. Village inhabitants used to go to church and light candles and celebrate Easter collectively until the late 1990s. If one asks them when the connection to the Christian religion broke they will say that it all stopped when what they refer to as “Wahhabism”¹ appeared in the valley.

¹ The major concern for Wahhabism is the strong preservation of the ethical and moral principles of Islam, which can only be derived from Quran and Sharia. Wahhabis consider that what is not written in Quran doesn't exist. They resist any kind of interaction between religion and local beliefs. The life of the orthodox Muslim is aimed at the consolidation and development of Islam. Non-believers (meaning every other person but Wahabbist, including errant Muslims as well as the followers of other religions) must return to the true faith.

Pelkmans in his book claims that the conversion to Christianity in Ajaria was motivated by a notion of modernity, and that “it held a promise of a modern future”. (2006: 142-168) By implication, for many of those who converted to Christianity, Islam became a cultural symbol of backwardness. Of course, Pankisi Valley and Ajaria are two different cases with a different history. However, what might be common is that Soviet secularism made many of the people born and raised in Soviet times indifferent to religion. Many of them simply were not interested in religion and for them religion was often associated with something that old people were dealing with. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when religious faith became pivotal in the nation building process, people started to seek for spiritual homes. When Duisians (people in Duisi village) looked back to religion, they didn’t find Sufi Islam their spiritual home; Sufism is for many people of all generations in the region considered outdated and is often associated with backwardness (See chapter two). Therefore, people looked for new ways that would be more argumentative and convincing. Most of the middle aged people just continued their secular way of life, even though they started to read the Quran in a Georgian translation. Others, most of the young and some of the middle aged found their spiritual home in “new understanding of Islam”, and those became the people that now are often called (by the media, Georgian people and Kist people who have negative sentiments towards them) “Wahhabis”.

The young and the renewal of Islam

The flow of refugees from Chechnya had a profound influence on religious revival in the valley. However, the type of Islam that was brought by refugees was dramatically different from the type of Islam people in the valley had been practicing. This “new understanding of Islam” which meant a more central role for Islamic law and religion in public life, and a stronger presence of Islam in individual believers’ everyday lives and practices inspired some people, mainly the young, and distressed many others (mainly elderly people) in the valley.

Before I continue writing about how “new understanding of Islam” spread in the valley, I would like to first define what I mean by the “new understanding of Islam” and briefly discuss the terminology problem around different forms of practiced Islam which emerged at the end of the 1990s in the valley. The new form of Islam was identified with Wahhabism and/or fundamentalism

by the Georgian media, Georgian people and initially by many of the local people in the valley. In her book „*Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe*” Kristen Ghodsee (2010) refers to the terminology problem in describing revived forms of Islam and she chooses to rule out terms like “fundamentalist” or “Wahhabis” because of their negative connotations. She claims that in the Bulgarian context Wahhabis and fundamentalist are often used as synonymous with “terrorists” (2010:16). The tendency to identify Wahhabism with terrorism is also quite common in the Pankisi context. Godsee, after discussing the terminology problems, chooses to use the term “orthodox Islam”. She refers to Talal Asad and his juxtaposition of “orthodox Islam” with “traditional Islam” where the “proponents of the former use scriptural authority to claim a rightful version of their religion”. Therefore, Godsee decides that “orthodox Islam” fits well to the Bulgarian context (2010:15). I would point out that a juxtapositioning between “orthodox” and “traditional” Islam does indeed take place in Pankisi as well, however, I have chosen not to use the term because the term might cause confusion since “orthodox” is also associated with Christianity and Georgian Christians. Instead, I will use the term “Scripturalist” (Asad 1986: 6) to denote the “Scriptural authority”, Salafi inspired understanding of Islam. The term Scripturalist, I think, fits quite well the Pankisi case since in a local context the main emphasis is upon a new way of understanding Islam that is “text centered” (Marsden, 2005:159) literate, “Quran centered”, and therefore correct. However, the label Scripturalist might not fit well as a description of the religious approach of all the young who are followers of “new understanding of Islam”. Many of the young Muslims might not be reading the Qur’an at all, however, they might be repeating and strictly following what other, more literate young Muslims have read. Therefore, to be more accurate I will also use the term “pious” to define generally the young who sympathize Scripturalist Islam and who try to follow moral teachings of the Qur’an in everyday life. Occasionally, I will also use the descriptive term “new mosque followers” which is sometimes used by my interlocutors and also does not have negative or politicized connotations. I will, occasionally also use the term “new understanding of Islam” since the form of Islam is still considered by the local people to be a new form of Islam engagement, different from the “old” Sufi Islam engagement.

Former Kist migrants and their Islamic inspirations

Even though followers of ‘new understanding of Islam’ Islam are mainly the young in the valley, there are quite a few men in their forties and fifties who are the followers of Scripturalists Islam. They can be considered as pioneer Kists who got inspired by Scripturalist Islam and who gained some knowledge in Islam after the collapse of the Soviet Union when they were quite young. These men are former Kist migrants who have lived and worked in Chechnya. The stories told by these middle aged men how they got engaged in spiritual life are almost identical. According to their stories they have been always interested in Islam but they never had a chance to learn much about religion during the Soviet times. In the beginning of the nineties when they were in Grozny they got a chance for the first time to get a Qur’an in Russian language and after this they joined religious groups and started to learn about the “correct” and literate Islam. These middle aged men are referred by locals to be “those Kists who came back from Chechnya as Wahhabis” and started preaching “Wahhabism” together with Chechen refugees.

Second Chechen war and its impact on religious renewal in the valley

During the Russian –Chechen wars radical Islam (associated with Wahhabism by the Russian state and media) was the impetus for Chechen warriors against Russia who wished to establish an Islamic republic and install Sharia law. Wilhelmsen Claims that” Islam became politicized and served as a means of interpreting and organizing extreme situations” and further that Chechen warlords aimed to unite Chechnya and Daghestan as one Islamic republic (Wilhelmsen 2005: 38).

During the war in 1999 some Chechen, as well as Kist warriors, fighting for independent Chechnya came to Pankisi as refugees. For many of the young Kists Chechen warriors became the symbol of bravery, the ones who fight for the freedom of Chechnya until death. For many young Kists (as well as some of the elders) the situation in Chechnya is humiliating for the Chechen people as they are “enslaved” by Russia, meaning Chechens have to practice the traditions and religion that is promoted by the Russian supported government.

The Chechen warriors understanding of Islam's role in people's life and in society in general is considered to be a radical direction of Islam. The understanding of Islam for the Chechen warriors is likely to be inspiring in quest for freedom from what is seen as Russian repression and independence for Chechnya.

People in the valley often recall the initial hostility Pankisi inhabitants had against the followers of this new understanding of Islam (in Chapter 2 and 5 we will see how this hostility is gradually transformed). They often explain this hostility by the "arrogant" and "aggressive" behavior the young, mainly Kist refugees, used to have against aspects of the traditional mode of life in the valley. Village people reacted especially grievously, when they thought that the Islamic renewal movement threatened the most important tradition of the Kists, namely the tradition of seniority which is considered by the Kists to be the fundamental value of the valley community. As an example of the arrogance and disrespect to this fundamental tradition Kists usually narrate the story of how "Wahhabists" started their life in the valley. According to the story young Kists and Chechens went to a mosque in the village where they became discontented about the (kind of) Islam practiced in the mosque and they started to tell the elders that it was all wrong. The elders in the mosque became insulted and threw them out of the mosque. To underline these young men's perceived arrogance, Kists often comment during the story that "the cads started to preach to the elders" or "those cads said they knew better than them" and claim that the story had a logical ending "and of course they threw them out". A few violent actions are also connected to the name of "Wahhabis" such as destroying old pagan holy places or throwing down the cross from the Jokholo church. The main focus of the second chapter will be on the current religious situation in the village and particularly on the roles of two different forms or directions of practiced Islam: one which has been practiced since the end of the 19th century and which is today considered to be an "outdated" and uneducated way of practicing Islam by many, particularly younger, people in the village; and the other, a new way locally of understanding Islam that has spread at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century in the Pankisi valley and mainly become popular with the younger generation. I will show that adopting the new way of understanding Islam empowered the young with a certain religious authority in the valley that had its impact on the seniority and age- hierarchy based community.

Before starting the Chapter three, I would also like to briefly review the outlines of the rest of the chapters of the thesis. In the third chapter, I will discuss how the traditional authority of elders is

challenged by the young. The elders' "challenged authority" is perhaps most clearly expressed and best illustrated through two at times competing legal and moral systems. Through an examination of how and when Tribal law and Sharia law are drawn on to mediate in conflicts in the valley, I will explore the issues of contested power and authority between the elder and the younger in the valley. The focus of the fourth chapter will be on women and their involvement in public life in the village. Soviet ideology encouraged women to take part in the public sphere and at some extent equalized them with men in public life (though women met difficulties in equality since they also carried most of the workload in private sphere as mothers and wives, see Nantes 2005; Khalid 2007). In the Pankisi a significant role in the social sphere during the Soviet times, was performed by women who at the same time were spiritual Sufi leaders. Those women sometimes mediate in conflicts together with their male counterparts in the conflict resolution process. However, women who mediate in conflicts today are quite disconnected from Sufi spiritual engagements. Furthermore, women Sufi spiritual leaders today are not at all associated with those who take part in conflict resolutions. Finally, the women who are identified as followers of more strict, Scripturalist understanding of Islam in the valley might discourage themselves or might be discouraged (by their husbands, brothers, fathers) from participating both in religious and secular social activities.

In the final chapter I will discuss the way in which ideas about religiosity and modernity are connected in discourses about what it means to be a Muslim Kist. Modernity is understood differently by people dependent on their position on religiosity and the way they see their identity as Muslim. Furthermore, I will explore the question why it was the "new" purist and Scripturalist Islam and not Sufi Islam that came to represent and be identified with religious revival in Pankisi. Why did a revival of religious engagement of faith and devotion not happen through the already existing tariqa's?

Chapter 2

Islam in the village

Previous chapter and introduction identified two different, general understandings of Islam's role in the valley. One which is anchored in Sufi Islam which has a presence in the valley since the end of the 19th century, and the other inspired by Salafi interpretations and practice of Islam found within the Sunni Islam which evolved at the end of the 20th century in the valley.

Antagonism and tension between above mentioned Islam practices are observable among Muslim communities in different parts of the world (Central Asia, Middle East, North Caucasus, Eastern Europe and the Balkans; Khalid 2007, Bringa 1995, Ghodsee 2010) where the traditional Islam and scriptural Islam are opposed to each other or where the followers of Scripturalist Islam and secular oriented people are opposed to each other. Opposition, to some extent, can be quite discernible, in the Pankisi valley. As we will see in this chapter some people in the village, may divide the Muslim community into followers of the new mosque and followers of the old mosque, or elders may express discontent that the young no longer respect traditions (see chapter three). However, as we will also see in the Pankisi context often there is no simple division between those who are new mosque followers, old mosque followers or those who do not go to the mosque at all. Text-centered Islam is often discussed and claimed to be the literate and "correct" way of understanding Islam according to the locals. Even though many people label Scripturalists negatively as "Wahhabis", I will show how "Wahhabis" can be seen positively in some contexts by people who are otherwise critical of them.

In the following chapter I will discuss the roles the two different Islam practices (Sufi Islam and Scriptural Islam) play in the village. I will focus on how Scripturalists perceive Sufi practice of Islam in pursuing of the "correct Islam" and vice versa, how Sufis perceive the new way of understanding Islam. Moreover, I will discuss the locals who do not associate themselves with either Sufis or Scripturalists, who can be characterized as those who do not attend mosques (either old mosque or new mosque) and show how they express their religiosity as Muslims, and how they perceive the religious engagements of Sufi Islam on the one hand and Scripturalist Islam on the other.

Old Mosque, New Mosque

The mosque where Sufis pray and which has been the only mosque for almost a century is no longer the one and only mosque in the village. About a decade ago the new mosque was built in the village. The new mosque is situated in the center of the village by the roadside. The old mosque is also in the center of the village; however it is not located by the roadside. The old mosque is situated among the houses, and one might find it difficult to locate the mosque on the narrow roads that wind themselves between the houses. The old mosque only differs from the other surrounding houses because it has a minaret. The new mosque is part of a complex of buildings which consists of mosque, Arabic school, and library¹.



Picture of the new mosque



Picture of the old mosque

¹ Library was completed in march 2014 after I left the field in January of that year

The two mosques have to some extent come to symbolize the religious divide in the village. Both young and older people in the village would during my conversation with them often indicate which of the two mosques they belong to as an identifier of their position in the local debate about religion and the role it should play in people's lives. They identify themselves with their particular mosque – *akhali mecheti* (New mosque) or *dzveli mecheti* (Old mosque) saying: “this is my mosque” while also distancing themselves from the other mosque (which they do not attend) by referring to it as “their mosque”. The young usually identify themselves with new mosque, while Sufi followers as well as some of the middle aged or elderly who do not go to the mosque at all identify themselves with the old mosque. The old mosque is often referred to as the mosque of old people in the village while the new mosque is associated with the young people. When older people were explaining (to me) who in the village are “Wahhabists” they refer to the new mosque and say: “those who are going to that mosque”. Many middle aged or elder women or men who do not go to a mosque at all might also be considered to be part of the “old mosque” by the young attendees of the new mosque. Many middle aged and elders, who do not go to the mosque, also consider themselves to be the part of the old mosque. The old mosque is often linked to the “traditional” and “ancestral” in local discourse while the new mosque is connected to the “modern”. Being part of the old mosque doesn't necessarily mean to be follower of Sheikh or Haji *wird*, but it shows the connection and belonging to the “traditional” and “ancestral” and detachment from the “modern”.

Old mosque followers and Sufism

Most of the old mosque followers in every day conversations identify themselves as Haji *murids* or Sheikh *murids*. However if they, for instance, tell a history of their religion in the valley, some of them might also identify themselves as followers of *Nakhshbandi* (Naqshbandi) or *khadiri* (*Qadiriyya*) *tarikhati* (Tariqa).

Haji - kunta haji Kashiev is founder of Qadiriyya order in Chechnya that was imported in Pankisi valley by some “mullahs” (see introduction). Sheikh - Is effendi (see introduction) is founder of Naqshbandi order in Duisi village (see introduction). Sheikh or Haji are said to be *ustaazes* (Ustadh that means a teacher in Arabic) – teachers who transferred religious knowledge to people. Followers

of Haji and Sheikh believe that they follow the path of their *ustaaaz*. *Ustaaz* for the village *murids* is seen to be the mediator between them and Allah. During the *ziyarat* ritual (see below) *murids* ask their *ustaaaz* for various things like good health, well-being, peace, etc. thus *ustaaaz* can give them help by mediating with Allah. Haji *murids* from Duisi village during the Soviet times used to visit the tomb of Kunta hajis mother Kheda in Chechnya (Kunta Haji itself died in exile). Tomb is believed to have supernatural power. Local Kists believed that if they would do a Ziyarat and give away some goods (money, food and other commodities) supernatural power of the tomb could cure ill, infertility, etc. Even though Sheikh Is Efendi's cemetery is in Georgia, approximately 110 kms far from the village, it is no longer intensely visited by Kists as it once was. During soviet times despite the engagement in Sufi rituals many Kists used to visit a cemetery of Sheikh Is Efendi believing in supernatural power of the place could cure ill or cure infertility. Today, very few *murids* go to visit the cemetery of their *ustaaaz*. The practice of going to cemeteries is regarded to be superstitious by most of the Kists in the village. Sheikh *murids* themselves are quite old and they rarely visit the cemetery.

Haji *murids* are related to the Qadiriyya tariqa while Sheikh *murids* to Naqshbandi tariqa. The idea of Tariqa is a relationship between teacher and *murid* where the latter is guided to the "path of truth" of Sufi order. However, in Duisi both teachers Sheikh are Efendis of Naqshbandi order and Kunta Haji of Qadiriyya order are dead. Conscious or unconscious of the idea of the tariqa some of the people have criticized the attitude of Sheikh and Haji *murids* towards their dead teacher, claim about the naïve believes of *murids* in the valley. "They say that they follow the teachings of their teacher, tell me what can dead man teach you?" – Sanua in her sixties asks. Especially critical regarding acknowledging the dead teachers is a small group (5-6 families) of *murids* who identify themselves to be *murids* of Naqshbandi tariqa and who are well known in the village by the fact that they in contrast to the other *murids* have a teacher who is alive. Followers of Naqshbandi tariqa stress the importance of their teacher, they believe that without the instructions and guidance of the teacher a *murid* is not able to increase his engagement with religion in order to get closer to God. "The teacher gives his *murid* tasks(tasks as I was explained by the Naqshbandi *murids* were how much and how to pray) and every year he has to evaluate, how well he/she did his work, if the *murid* did it well, than the teacher will give him another, more difficult task, if he didn't do good work than he has to repeat the same ... like a student in school, you know ..." – Isidore, in his 70-75 explains to me. Naqshbandi

murids believe that sheikh and Haji followers will not be able to get closer to God because their religious engagement and knowledge doesn't develop, and it is simply because they do not have a teacher to guide them. Naqshbandi followers appeared in the village in late 1970s after several locals traveled to Daghestan where they were introduced to the Naqshbandi teachings and where they also met a teacher. There are only a handful of people who actually met a teacher a couple of times. Naqshbandi followers claim that they no longer go or they are no longer able to go to Dagestan (because of the closed border and visa issues). Therefore, one could claim that Naqshbandi followers themselves, even though they have a teacher do not "develop" in their religious engagement and knowledge, simply because they do not or no longer have any connection to their teacher.

Another way Haji and Sheikh *murids* refer to themselves is being followers of Haji *wird* or Sheikh *wird*. Wird in Sufism is defined as a practice of repeating the name of Allah. One of my young interlocutors defines the term. "Wird is an Arabic word" – he says. He explains that for Sufi believers it is their religious practice which they repeat every day. Sufi elders themselves define the term *wird* as referring to the beads they use. Some of them say that it is how they pray and talk into the beads. "It's said that you have to talk into the beads... Talking into the beads, that's what the *wird* is". In every day conversations *murids* use expression "doing a *wird*" which means praying or "talking", into the beads.



Picture of haji murid "doing wird"

The majority of the families in the valley belong to the Qadiriyya order (Haji *wird*) and the Imam of the village (who is the Imam of the whole valley at the same time) usually belongs to Haji *wird*. The followers of all three *wird* go to the same (old) mosque and pray together. They call those who are from a different *wird* their “brothers” and claim that the religious difference between them is only in performing Ziyarat rituals.

There are different practices related to Ziyarat in the village. Ziyarat is Arabic word and literally means to “visit”. (In Sufism Ziyarat means to visit the tombs of the saints. People from different places [Central Asia, Turkey] practice Ziyarat by going to the Shrines and tombs to get blessing [Louw 2007 Tapper 1990]). Kist Sufies use the word Ziyarat to refer to a communal weekly prayer, funeral prayer and the visiting of sacred sites (see above).

In the village context “doing a Ziyarat” is a ritual when murids stand and move around in a circle or sit in a circle chanting collectively “La ilaha ilallah” (There is no god but Allah). When they say they are going to do a Ziyarat, they usually mean a ritual when they do a *zikr*. Ziyarat is performed in a same way whether it is held as a weekly prayer, funeral prayer or done on a sacred site.

In the village when talking about differences between Sufi orders murids (as well as other Kists) usually talk about the differences in the performance of the ritual: “They perform it in daylight ... they move in a circle when they pray, while when we pray we sit instead in a dark place” – says one of my female interlocutors from Sheikh *wird*. And that is how they usually describe the difference between Haji *wird* and Sheikh *wird*.

Zikr is performed once a week in both *wirds* by both females and males. Haji *wird* followers perform it in a small room for “Ziyarat” next to the Mosque. Males perform the ritual on Sunday evening, after the sun has set while females perform it on Fridays. Sheikh *Wird* followers perform their ritual in a private house (men on Tuesday, women on Monday), the house where Sheikh Is Effendi lived and died. His house is opened up for Sheikh *wird* followers when the day comes for the “Ziyarat”.

Ziyarats are attended by 5-15 men or women every week (even less Sheikh *wird* people attend Ziyarats). Followers of Sufi tariqas are mainly old people. The youngest follower is a 58 years old female, head of the Haji *wird*, and a 55 year old man – Imam in the valley. I have attended the rituals of each *wird*, except the ritual of male followers of Sheikh *wird*. They have told me that there are more members of the *wird* but because of old age some of them are not able anymore to attend and

perform the ritual, especially the ones who are from Haji *wird* since their ritual requires a lot of energy and effort. Often Sufi followers nostalgically remember the large number of followers and attendants they had in past times. They remember that even in Soviet times, when the mosque was closed and religion was forbidden, they were so many that they couldn't all fit in a small room for Ziyarats. Some of the Haji *wird* followers remember that they were 30 and even more sometimes. People in the village, some of them with sadness and some of them with satisfaction, predict this is the last generation who follows tariqas and "there will not be any more Ziyarats after that". For the many young Kists this is how it should be. However, some of the young have ambivalent attitudes towards the Sufis and rituals, on one hand they are attracted to the *zikr* performance as their "folklore", on the other hand they do not consider it correct Islam. People who are worried about the future of *zikr* is mainly the elder people who devotedly follow their *wird*, or those who might not attend the ritual themselves but who consider the rituals as part of their traditions and beliefs, and who, for instance, cannot imagine a funeral without Ziyarat.

Sufism as folklore and culture

As I pointed out above Sufi religious experience is considered by some people to be folklore, and something "nice to watch and listen". This attitude towards religious expression of Sufis maybe strengthened by the women ensemble in the village which performs Sufi *zikrs* on a concert stage which means they shift the sacred to a profane space.

In 1997 Makhvala who is now in her 80s established a women's singing ensemble that continues to attract the attention of tourists, journalists, ethnographers and ethnomusicologists in the valley. The ensemble includes women both from the Naqshbandi and Qadiriyya Tariqas and they perform *zikrs* from both of the Sufi orders. Furthermore, the ensemble also performs songs from Georgian and Chechen folklore that has nothing to do with religion.

One of the elder women even calls the women performing the rituals to be artists. It is also significant and understandable that Makhvala herself is not involved in Sufi religious rituals. She has been doing her prayers at home but has not participated in rituals.

Makhvala claims that the idea to establish an ensemble came to her when the “crack” appeared between Chechnya and Georgia (The “crack” refers to the damaged relationship between Chechens and Georgians that was conditioned by the Chechens participation in Georgia-Abkhazia war on the Abkhaz side in 1992, and also that Chechen warriors and refugees brought religious agitation to the Georgian land). Makhvala called her ensemble *Marshua kavkaz* which in Chechen language means peace in Caucasus. Her desire, as she claims was to “draw a bridge” of peace between the Chechen and Georgian people. Later, after the year 2000, the ensemble crossed the border of Georgia and Kist women traveled to several countries in Europe (Germany, Belgium, Poland) to perform their *zikr* for the world, and the ensemble fulfilled their desires to sing for world peace, and also to show and tell the world that Chechens are not only violent and bad people.

Makhvala also has a guesthouse which is the only guesthouse in the village. Therefore, if any tourists or researchers go to the valley they mainly stay in Makhvala's guesthouse. Makhvala is always enthusiastic to gather her ensemble of women and perform *zikrs* and other songs for her visitors. Tourists and researchers are also encouraged to go to the *zikr* rituals and see *ziyarat*. Their rituals (especially of women *murids*) have been audio and video recorded by many visitors in the valley. The women are happy to perform the rituals in front of visitors. During the ritual, visitors might even be asked to take pictures of the ritual. At the end of the ritual the woman leader of the Haji *wird* is ready to tell a story about Kunta Haji and his divine abilities). Males from the Haji *wird* are no less enthusiastic to receive visitors. If they have an unexpected visitor they might even express the regret that if they had known they would have a visitor, they would have gathered more *murids* that would give a better performance.

For some people in the valley (young, middle aged and elder) Sufi *zikrs* and performances are part of the culture and folklore that is nice to hear and watch but is no longer considered a modern-day religious practice. Some of my interlocutors claim that Sufi rituals and *zikrs* are interesting to watch and nice to hear but it should be a part of folklore and not a part of religion. Mariam, a young girl who claims to be both religious and traditional says that *zikr* indeed sounds somewhat unearthly and beautiful but she respects it as folklore but not as part of religion. Many middle aged or elderly females or males in the valley refuse to be involved in Sufi ritual practices and also refuse a potential involvement in the future. Some of them claim that they have no faith in *wirds* (usually meaning that

they do not have faith in divine characteristics *murids* ascribe to their teachers) and *zikr* rituals and that they are the affairs of those who don't have anything else left to do in their lives.

New mosque followers -Scripturalist youth

While the older more secularly oriented village generations often talk about Soviet times in positive terms and at times with longing (see chapter one), the young and more religiously pious, see the end of Soviet rule as marking the liberation from secularism and the arrival of religious freedom.

“Religious freedom” as the young claim they obtained means the liberation from Soviet secularism. Religious freedom is often related to gaining new religious knowledge. According to the young people, gaining religious knowledge and acquiring religious freedom is connected to the “opening of the borders” (after the fall of the iron curtain). Opening the border for many young is connected to traveling and studying in Middle Eastern countries and getting access to knowledge about Islam. (Even though not many young have studied in Islamic countries there are still some of the young who gained an education and brought more religious knowledge in the village and in the valley). Today most of the young agree that the Soviet era was an abominable period that forbade the most important thing in a human's life – religion. Here is the classic dialogue between a middle aged aunt and her young nephew that illustrates the different points of view:

Aunt: “Earlier it was so nice. There was peace; there was no “Wahhabism”, nothing bad.”

Nephew: “That's because you didn't know if there was anything else.”

What can be learned through observation and inquiries in the village is that the young are considered followers or sympathizers of the Scripturalist Islam. Some of the young in the valley (about 10 to 15. These numbers are based on my interviews with some of them. They indicated that their Kist friends also gained education in Middle Eastern countries) are especially Qur'an oriented since they received education in Middle Eastern countries and know some Arabic. They anchor all their arguments in Scriptures: the Quran and hadiths. I experienced several times when in order to answer a question I asked, they would open the Quran and read a quote to certify their arguments

with the “words of Allah”. Those are also the young who are associated with “Wahhabis” by people in the valley as well as by the people in the rest of the country. Some of the young even though claiming that the “new understanding of Islam” is the correct way of religious engagement might be more secular oriented (meaning they are engaged in different social activities that are not approved by Scripturalists (see chapter 4), girls might or even might not be wearing headscarf, etc). They might distance themselves from “Wahhabis” by refer to the Scripturalists as “them” and often talk about “their” activities from an outsider’s perspective. “They are called Wahhabists because of the way they started their activities was a bit aggressive and arrogant in a way ... they were newly educated and radical and they started to lecture the elder” – says Maka – 25 years old girl, who is at the same time a sympathizer of Scripturalist Islam in the valley.. “However” – she continues, “People are becoming less and less hostile to each other, they started to see the positive side of either religion or traditions”.

Maka’s observation is quite important here in order to discuss what is “Wahhabism” according to locals. Who might be Wahhabis? Is Wahhabism understood in negative terms by all the people? And finally, are the young at all Wahhabis? Various opinions regarding “Wahhabism” in the valley give a possibility to arise all these questions for the Pankisi context.

The narrative of Wahhabism carries negative implication globally. Wahhabism is usually associated with resistance, terrorism, extremism and seen as opposed to peace. Various Muslim states might give the label Wahhabism and extremism to a religious group which they consider suspicious “regardless of their actual ideological or spiritual orientation” (Radanayagam 2006: 106). According to Radanayagam, who discusses the case of Uzbekistan, people who have been labeled Wahhabis can be those: “Who pray regularly and strictly observe the tenets of Islam to those who actually advocate the establishment of an Islamic state and Sharia law. People who openly proselytize on behalf of Islam, encouraging others to observe the Islamic duties of prayer, abstinence from alcohol” (2006: 107). Maria Louw , also writing about Uzbekistan describes the intense fear among the local people towards “Wahhabis” who have been portrayed by state media as terrorists , threats and danger for the state. (Louw 2007: 31-30)

Global narrative about “Wahhabism” has its response in Pankisi, for some local people indeed “Wahhabism” is connected to religious extremism and fanaticism. In Pankisi “Wahhabis”s can be those who go to foreign Middle Eastern and get the religious education. “They go normal and come back as

“Wahhabis” – Marina in her forties points out. What does it mean to become a “Wahhabi”?

According to some locals, those who become “Wahhabis” start to go to new mosque, young men start to wear beard and young girl start to wear Muslim hijab, “they strictly” or “fanatically follow the rules of Islam”, “they are against local customs and traditions” and are often blamed for bringing “all the mess” in the valley.

However, it should be noted that some people who use term “Wahhabi” do not give it any negative connotation, quite the contrary, the term “Wahhabi” can be used in a positive way as “Wahhabis” are also ascribed many positive features. According to some middle aged or elderly men or women people “Wahhabis” or “those who are very strong believers” do not drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes (which are seen as very positive features), they are not cheaters and liars, because of the strong piety, therefore they are often said to be reliable. “Wahhabis” or again “those who are very strong believers” do not participate or make any wrangles (many times it is because they do not drink, therefore they are always sensible) and therefore “Wahhabis” are also referred to as peaceful young men and women, who live a modest life and is devoted to Allah.

One could claim that the reason for this positive understanding of “Wahhabism” is conditioned by the circumstance that followers of the “new understanding of Islam” have not been dissociated and excluded from the public sphere and public debates which has been the case in central Asian countries, where the “suspicious” religious followers often were objects of persecution (Khalid 2007, Rosanayagam 2007). Therefore, local Pankisians have had the possibility to observe and learn about the young, and what many of them came to find is that “new understanding of Islam” can have positive effects on the young.

Some people are aware of the the negative connotation of the term “Wahhabism” and they reject to call the young who attends the new mosque “Wahhabis” or at least they refuse to call most of the young who attend the new mosque, “Wahhabis” These are the young Kists who try to be pious believers and who wear Muslim hijab or in a case of boys –wear the beard. Anzor, a middle aged man, who is said to be well versed in tribal law, expresses his discontent about how the young who simply try to be modest and religious are often labeled “Wahhabis”. “My daughter is very eager to be religious; she’s fifteen and decided to wear hijab, now some people will start to call her Wahhabi. Why should they do it? If one reads Quran and tries to be a proper Muslim why he/she is necessarily Wahhabi? Explain to me – why?” – He asks me emotionally.

The Qur'an-oriented young themselves would never call themselves "Wahhabis". Quite the contrary, they strongly object and express their discontent when they are referred to by that term. They claim that they are just Muslims or Sunni Muslims. One of my young interlocutors claims that he has incorrectly been labelled as Wahhabbi, but stressed that he is a "follower of the Qur'an" and not a follower of Wahhab. Another interlocutor states that he even feels insulted when he is identified as a Wahhabi. He argues that he follows the word of God and he doesn't have any teacher called Wahhabi.

Several Scripturalists referred to those locals who label new mosque followers "Wahhabis" and associate different negative aspects like aggression, fanaticism, extremism to their name. Some Scripturalists believe that religion moralized the young and made them very peaceful; some of them even claimed that today Pankisi valley is the most peaceful place in Georgia criminal wise. Scripturalists (as well as many other non Scripturalist locals) often remember the situation in nineties when the young were out of control (According to locals during nighties disturbances many young Kists were involved in criminal activities like stealing cattle and various other commodities, drug using, drinking and brawling, etc) were and claim that finally, today the young started to behave and the reason of their correct behavior is that they became religious. Some Scripturalists have pointed out that those locals, who see and draw the image of Scripturalists as dangerous and aggressive, simply do not wish to have peace in the valley and that they try to create a problem out of nothing. "You were here for months already" – Osman – a new mosque follower in his forties told me "have you ever seen any wrong? Have you ever seen our young misbehave? Have anyone told you any wrong, have anyone hosted you badly?".

Locals Perceptions about followers of Scripturalist Islam

It was quite noticeable how scornful some of the young were towards elder people who lead a more or less secular life as well as towards those who are the followers of Sufism. The former is disrespected because they live a non-religious life (not going to mosque, drinking wine, etc.). The young have more or less the same perceptions about the latter with the difference that Sufis do go to a mosque but first of all they follow the "wrong" Islam and second they are flippant in their religion.

The perception among these young devout Muslims is that those who follow Sufi-Islam have no knowledge what they are doing whatsoever. Being a true Muslim according to the followers of Scripturalist Islam means having knowledge of Islam, which in turn means having knowledge about what is written in the Qur'an and being able to follow the way of the Qur'an. According to the followers of "new understanding of Islam", in former times (before and during Soviet times) Quran was just an object, a holy object perhaps, but only used to take a vow to claim one's innocence while the real aim of the Quran is to open it, read it and practice it in life.

Following the Quran and scriptural Islam often means rejecting things like laws and celebrations that are created by humans and which are not given by the Qur'an. Followers of this strictly textual understanding of Islam established a Sharia law court in the new Mosque for those who are living in a "true Muslim way". (I will talk more about the Sharia law court in the chapter three.) They also reject all the secular holidays in the valley such as celebrating mother's day, women's day, New Year (which of course is also related to celebrating Gregorian "Christian" calendar) and birthdays. They believe that only Allah can establish the holidays, therefore the only holiday they must follow is Ramadan. They express their discontent regarding the secular holidays. To show their protest against New Year for instance they might cook only the simplest meals for the day, turn off the light and go to bed early.

According to the young, Sufi rituals are also created by human beings. There is no reference to the specific Sufi ritual like Ziyarat in the Qur'an, therefore it is wrong to follow and perform them. Practicing Sufi Islam itself is even considered to be against "correct" or "true Islam" and therefore wrong to follow. Followers of "new understanding of Islam" view Sufi orders as sects that were spread in the region when people knew nothing about Islam. Finally, they claim that Soviet atheism made people uneducated and ignorant of religion. Likewise, Sufi followers in turn, perceive of "new understanding of Islam" as a sect. To clarify to me what "Wahhabism" is like, they often refer to Jehovah's witnesses and tell me that Wahhabism is a sect in Pankisi, like the Jehovah sect in Georgia.

Sufi followers consider *wirds* to be the right faith to follow because this is the faith their ancestors were following, a faith which is adapted to their traditions and life. "Doing *wird*" and "doing *ziyarat*" is the work one must do for Allah in order to be close to him, in order to get a nice place close to Allah in the after-life.. In order to place their dead or even themselves in a nice place Sufis give a *saakh* (they use the Chechnian word derived from Arab via Turkish meaning "to give alms".) When

for instance a Kist has died, thereafter his relatives traditionally, every Thursday, give away food, sweets or clothes to neighbors who are poor. One can also give *saakh* for one's own sake. Those who are economically strong often give away products or money to others around them. I have heard about the case where a man gave all the inhabitants in his village a bag of flour, a few kilos of sugar and oil. On the day of ending Ramadan a man from Naqshbandi tariqa gave 10 laris to all the people who were present in the ritual room. (I was one of those who were given 10 laris). Later he explained to me that he gave money to people because of his spirit. "as you sow, so you will reap, when we die our God and Sheikh will help us there ... you have to pray and give to charity for that ... do you think I was crazy I gave the money to everyone there? That money is kept in a bank for me."

According to the Scripturalists this way of giving charity might be considered as boasting and showing off to the people how kind they are, rather than something that is done for the sake of God. I have heard one of the young criticizing the way charity is traditionally practiced in the community. He claims that if you give to charity, you must make sure you do not boast about it, other people shouldn't see that you are charitable. "When you give to charity you must forget that you did it. Allah sees everything, so when you give money or whatsoever in front of people Allah knows that you are not doing it for his sake and that you're just boasting". Moreover, the young explains that *saakh* which is equivalent for Zakat is not given away in a correct Islamic way in the traditional Islam. They criticize the local way of giving *saakh* (*sweets, food*) on every Thursday for the spirit of the dead member of the family or giving away *saakh* for the *ustaaz*.

For the Sufi elders it is important to work hard for Allah as I pointed out above (doing *ziyarats* and *wirds*). They perceive the way of new religious direction (scripturalist Islam) as being easy, because it doesn't require any special effort to follow it. According to the elder Sufis what new mosque followers do is only pray five times in a day, nothing else. I've even heard the opinion by one of the elders that the young are choosing "Wahhabism" because it is easy to fulfill. According to the elder doing *ziyarats* or *wirds* are difficult and important part of religious engagement and the young do not bother themselves with difficulties

At the same time followers Scripturalists perceive the elders as wasting energy for nothing. They mockingly call them "jumpers" (because of the way haji *murids* perform Ziyarat: clapping hands, hitting feet against the floor) and claim that they spend their energy for nothing when they can use it for something important instead. "Come and help me plow the land, do something useful, why do

you need to jump and waste your energy” – one of the follower of Scripturalist Islam said sarcastically.

Locals' reflections on “modern” and “text centered” Islam

In the Pankisi Valley Sufism and the Scripturalist Islam are often confronted and debated through by people. According to many young, middle aged and even by some of the elderly Sufism is considered to be backward and outdated religious engagement while Scriptural Islam is updated and modern. For some of the people in the valley the new religious direction is almost without a question progressive and the right way to base a life on. For many of the young as well as many middle aged and some elderly Sufism is based on myths and legends and it is not to be taken seriously. Some of the people even slipped in talking that Sufi was “Soviet religion”. Of course, it was not that they didn't know that the presence Sufism in the valley preceded Soviet time, what their attitude shows is that Sufism belongs to the past, that the collapse of the Soviet Union brought new ways and there is no room left for what majority of people consider “backward” Sufi religious engagements in the modern era.

“Modern” religion in the valley is considered to be the progressive religious way by its followers, who consider themselves to be superior to others because they follow the scholarly way of religion. In this section I want to discuss the various people's reflections on what they see as more progressive and modern ways of religious engagement. Magnus Marsden in his book “living Islam” on the case of Rowshan people in Pakistan discusses the ways of intellectual reflections of the people and different kinds of intellectual understandings in the village. What comes up as interesting intellectual oppositions is the Sunni and Ismai'li peoples' difference in intellectuality. Marsden points out that the role of Ulama in anthropological discussions is often as “figures of strong authority and the possessors of text-centered knowledge of the word of god”. (2005: 159) Marsden suggests that such knowledge is also often “depicted as rooted in standardized and unchanging traditions of what proper debate entails in the Islamic science.” Therefore he claims it is “neither Ulama nor (especially) village Ismai'lis who “value or cultivate the means to exercise independent critical thoughts in a Muslim life and virtue (2005: 159).

In contrast to Sunni Muslims, Ismai'lis are often shown to be more "open" to the world with more of a critical thinking. Ismai'lis tend to keep the faith more in their heart and are being open for various kinds of knowledge while Sunnis are more focused on religion and do not go farther beyond text centered knowledge. Marsden continues to make claims about different styles of embodied knowledge in the village where "one style values knowledge as fixed and enduring and emphasizes religious piety as a bodily state of self-discipline while the other entails a conception of the intellect that values individual intellectual creativity and bodily freedom". (Marsden 2005: 163)

In the context of Duisi village such people with intellectual creativity can be considered some of the secular people, mainly middle aged. Women for instance, wearing simple scarfs, believing that clothes are not the way to mark degree of religiousness. Shorena who has quite some knowledge of the Qur'an and Sharia and even knows some Arabic language is one of those who keeps her religious faith in her heart. She both criticizes the lack of religious knowledge of modern day Sufi followers, and she also claims that the young new mosque followers are those who have religious knowledge but their general knowledge is limited. "They are only interested in religion, you cannot be open-minded if you only know about one religion and if you know nothing else, you have a closed mind."

For some of the middle aged people followers of both old and new mosque are seen as backward but for different reasons. Old mosque followers are considered not to have any religious knowledge, or any answers to questions related to Islam and its teachings, and as one of my interlocutors with this view put it: "their only answer is 'we do it or we believe like this because our ancestors believed in it". New mosque followers do have religious knowledge; they have standardized answers and explanations for everything; however they are not open to thinking beyond the standardized interpretation of Qur'an, they do not reflect, in this respect they are similar to Sufi elders who do things because their ancestors were doing so.

There are quite a few middle aged people in the valley who might not be approving the "excessive religiosity" of the followers of Scripturalist Islam, however they are quite understandable about the religious revival processes the young undergoes. Asmath, one of my middle aged, secular oriented interlocutors, explains that even though the young can be too radical, they should be understood. "After the collapse of the Soviet Union the young became in need of religious faith, they rushed into an old mosque but they couldn't find sufficient power of spirituality, they wanted to know more, they wanted to understand more in religion and the new mosque gave it to them". However, she

believes that the process is temporal and the radicalism of the young will change. She believes that it just needs some time. Irakli, a middle aged secular man, also believes that the radicalism of the young is temporal, “it will pass”- he believes. He is not reluctant to point out the good and positive together with the negative aspects about the young’s engagement with religion and correct Islam: “They are far from bad habits: they do not drink or smoke, they have an interest in religion and want to learn more, but their problem is that they do not study anything beyond that”.

Furthermore, some of the people even question the religious education of the young claiming there are only a few in the valley who actually are educated in Islam and others just blindly and unquestionably follow what they are told by those who have an education. “Those are a bunch of ignorant kids who repeat blindly what they are told” – says a middle aged man in her fifties. Indeed, some of the people question the seriousness of the religious knowledge of the young.

“I am truly amazed – sarcastically notes one of the middle aged man - how talented and fast they are in learning Arabic ... I know the young, they do not even know how to write properly in Georgian and suddenly they claim to know how to write in Arabic, after going to that school for two weeks ... they haven’t read anything in their lives and suddenly they know the Quran by heart“

Several people in the village criticize the younger generations standardized and dogmatized way of understanding Islam. They believe the Quran is complex and wide in its understanding and cannot give concrete answers to everything. “They take everything without questioning” – a women in her forties tells me “They have answers to everything but who says its right? I might read the same quote from Qur’an, understand it differently and give a different answer”

Middle aged locals and religious engagement

In the context of Central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, or Tajikistan) secular Muslims have been described by several authors (Khalid 2007, Louw 2007, Pelkmans 2008). After independence (the collapse of the Soviet Union) in Louw’s words “Many citizens continue to lead a rather secular life, considering themselves to be Muslims but not engaging in religious practices” (2007: 23) Islam in Central Asians states is strongly connected to the ethno-nationalism, “Muslimness” often means to be

secular Muslim, “a-religious” as Pelkmans claims (Pelkmans 2008), . Secular Muslims are often opposed to those who are “religious” and who they often describe as extremists, “Wahhabis”.

I found it quite tricky to label many people as secular in the Pankisi context. As I discussed earlier many middle aged and elder people express nostalgia towards the Soviet Union, when they used to have a nice life. Many middle aged or elderly, both males and females, are indeed continuing to live, in their everyday life, like they lived during the Soviet era. By continuing the Soviet lifestyle I mean drinking and feasting, joking freely and loudly, singing while feasting, etc. They usually celebrate the holidays they used to during Soviet times (which are today rejected by the young) like: Mother’s day, Women’s day and New Year (traditionally by decorating a New Year tree and preparing Georgian traditional sweets for New year like Gozinakhi (made of caramelized nuts fried in honey) or Churchkhela (stringed walnuts dipped in grape syrup).

Usually these middle aged or elderly do not go to mosques, claiming the most important thing is what one truly believes in his/her heart. However, what questions labeling them as seculars are that many of those middle aged or elderly have started to be engaged in Ramadan and some of them started to pray five times a day. Wine drinking and feasting usually stops in the month of Ramadan and after Ramadan is over regular wine drinking lifestyle continues. For some of the people their engagement in Ramadan and praying is connected to the Chechens who entered the valley and brought a “strong Islam faith” to the Kist people. Some of the middle aged people have claimed that their “children” know much about religion and they tell them how important is to pray or follow Ramadan. “I started to pray ... my boy tells me kind of things what will happen if I do not pray that I get scared” – says one of the middle aged women. A few women have pointed out that their daughters or sons, who never forget to pray on time, usually remind them as well that it is time to pray. One of the middle aged school teacher told me that: “Well, I have so many things to do that I often forget to pray but my daughter, if she is around, always reminds me that it is time to pray”. The same teacher has pointed how embarrassed she has felt when she found that all her pupils in the class knew the meaning of the words of the daily prayer while she didn’t.

It is quite obvious that young Kists have quite an influence on their parents’ religious sentiments. What is quite discernible in the village is that people cannot simply be divided into seculars and religious. Radical form of Islam which the locals associate with Wahhabism, was maybe a thrust and inspiration for religious awakening sentiments among the young and lead them to practice a

Scripturalist form of Islam, but this “new” way of understanding Islam doesn’t necessarily need to be radical nor does it need to be associated to Wahhabism. In chapter five I will explore the question whether Islam is really radical in the valley. Followers of the “new understanding of Islam” are not considered dangerous “others” by most of the people in the village as they are reportedly in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia. The “new understanding of Islam” is debated and discussed in the valley. Scriptural Islam for many people is not unilaterally accepted or rejected. That is one of the way to assert that “new understanding of Islam” in Pankisi context is not just Central Asian “radical Islam”. What I will be arguing in Chapter five is that because Islam in Pankisi was not/could not be politically engaged and its followers couldn’t claim for radical changes (see chapter five) it gradually became acceptable at some extent. Moreover, one can even claim that the religiosity and piety of the followers of pious Muslims has even become meritorious for the elder.

To go back to the point of the section, one might assert that many of the middle aged or elderly, despite of their Soviet nostalgia and Soviet influenced lifestyle does not simply fit into the category of being secular; indeed they are too engaged in the process of religious awakening in the valley.

Chapter 3

Challenging authority

Even though very often people in the valley approve of the religiosity of their sons and daughters, debates about the young and the “new understanding of Islam” often do not go without intense discussions. The Kist community is traditionally based on the principle of seniority and age hierarchy which is unlikely to be upheld in the modern day conditions, simply because the elder do not have authority on knowledge anymore. The young people are choosing themselves what way of life they want to follow. The tradition of *upros-umcrosoba* (literally translated from Georgian: tradition of the elder and the young, meaning the tradition of seniority) is still considered to be the fundamental value of the Kist community but the young and the middle aged or elderly might have different perceptions about how to honour the above mentioned tradition. The young often express their belief that they do honour the tradition of *upros-umcrosoba* while their elders may express the belief that might think they do not. Today, the tradition has been modified in a way that it distresses some elder people in the valley. The modification is that the young, while still using all the traditional etiquette for showing respect to elders (standing up when an elder enters, being quiet when an elder talks, not smoking or using impolite words in the presence of an elder), do not accept, without questioning, what elders say any more. What distresses some of the elders is that the young simply act according to their own will and that they do not listen to them anymore. For many elders the tradition of *upros-umcrosoba* and respect towards elders is understood in the traditional sense (accepting the authority of the elder without questioning) while for the young following the tradition and respecting the elder is just to show the etiquette and have respectful manners.

Some of the young who are considered to be the head representatives of “Wahhabism” (mainly those who received some education in foreign countries) are thought to be particularly disrespectful and antagonistic towards tradition, since they dear to challenge the elders about the right or wrong or moral rules and religious practices.

In the first part of the chapter I will discuss how the elders’ loss of spiritual and moral authority conditioned the modification of the fundamental tradition of *upros-umcrosoba*. As I also discussed in the previous chapter the young hold the religious knowledge and their morality are entirely based on the Qur’anic principles. Invoking the Qur’an principles empower the young to claim their religious

authority and they challenge the traditional authority of elders who used to have the sole authority and now no longer do because the young have grown more knowledgeable in matters of the Qu'ran. An illustrative example of how the elders authority is challenged transpires through an analysis of two competing legal and moral systems, tribal and Sharia law, and this will be the main topic of the second part of the chapter.

The tradition of *upros-umcrosoba*

As already mentioned *upros-umcrosoba* is considered to be the fundamental tradition among the Kist community. The young are supposed to obey and respect the elders. Kists claim that in some cases even a one year difference matters and according to the tradition it will be disrespectful if the younger brother for instance smokes or says nasty words in front of his brother. Therefore, one has to be obedient and respectful to those who are older than oneself and of course the most respected in the community are old people who are obeyed by the most people which would be all the age-sets younger than themselves.

Today it is considered by some of the Kists that the fundamental value of respecting the elders is threatened by the religious young. The young, challenge an authority based on age by having better knowledge of the Quar'an. However, the young themselves deny being disrespectful in any way. Many of the young consider they keep the tradition conscientiously and do not consider that the *upros-umcrosoba* is in any way threatened. What I will argue below is that tradition of *upros-umcrosoba* has been modified and is no longer functions as seniority –age hierarchy based practice in its traditional sense.

The first and obvious issue why the tradition of *upros-umcrosoba* is modified is that in modern day Kist community-life acquiring knowledge is no longer dependent on the oral narratives that used to be transmitted from the elder to the young. Various kinds of information are easily accessible by the young. Moreover, the knowledge that was once transmitted orally nowadays exists on papers. Oral narratives and oral law are gathered, written down and even published as books. The books of Khaso Khangoshvili (2005) or Leila Margoshvili (1985) are poignant examples of this. Khangoshvili in his books "Kists" (2005) lists the tribal regulations and some changes that were made in the sixties by the

council elders. Therefore the knowledge that was once occupied and possessed by a few, privileged people today is equally accessible for everyone of any age category. Not only do they no longer need to be enlightened by the elders but through their knowledge of new information technologies they have access to so much more information, including information relating to traditional law and customs that their elders. Some parents have, indeed, told me that today their teenage sons and daughters are “teaching them” about different things because the young are familiar with modern technologies and internet and have access to different kinds of information. “My children read about so many things on the internet ... some things I haven’t even heard about” – 36 years old Mzia tells me. Therefore the elders simply do not have access to the resources and thus the power that came with being the source of information and knowledge- the kind of information that used to be considered important... which would help them remain the authoritative figures for the young

The older the person became, the more respectable he would become. Being old meant having more experience and therefore more knowledge to transmit. However, older and more experienced also means experience of Soviet times and for many of the young, the Soviet experience of their parents’ and grandparents’ generation is shameful. The young consider that the Soviet times were the most degrading and humiliating period in their history, primarily because of the Soviet doctrine of “godlessness”. Some of the young also claim that the generations that went through Soviet times are corrupted, in the sense that they do not care about spiritual matters or their spiritual well-being but rather about physical joys like drinking, feasting, having fun and enjoying women (“having women”).

Nevertheless, the young often romanticize about the greatness of tradition of *upros umcrosoba*. One of my young interlocutors dreamily said that those who were respectable elders in the valley are dead by now; “they were the fathers of our grandfathers”. The young Kists do have a wish to follow traditions that do not go against Islam, however, they have difficulties in seeing those traditions represented by their fathers or grandfathers.

Difficulties the young encounter has much to do with the fact that the young today are prioritizing religious knowledge and trying hard to live a religious life and be nothing like their fathers used to be in Soviet times. Many middle aged and older people say that the young, even children, have more religious knowledge and are more religious than them. They have suggested to me that if someone wants to have a better religious explanation than they can provide, he or she have to ask someone from the new mosque. Indeed, parents are often introduced to and explained about Islam by their

teenage sons or daughters. For instance, we saw in chapter two how a school teacher (as well as some others in their forties and fifties) is reminded by her daughters when the time comes for praying. Many Kist accept that their children know best when the issue is Islam. They claim that the young are pursuing the correct way of life. Nestan in her fifties said her son knows better and live his live “the right way”, however, she claims “it is too late for her” (meaning adapting the practices of correct Islam), and that she will remain “a woman of the old Soviet system”.

Thus, today the young are the ones considered to be the keepers of religious knowledge and are considered to be living a religious life. Nevertheless, many of the young, even though they are not fond of their fathers’ Soviet past or present life, even though they might ridicule some elders who talk about “Wahhabis” with anger, even though they might think they know better still praise that the tradition which prescribes that the young must be respectful towards their elders and are keen to maintain this tradition. However, as I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter their actual practicing of the tradition is modified, their understanding of respecting their elders is showing the proper manners or act in accordance with the wish of elders it is not about agreeing with them on matters religious and spiritual. For instance the young might serve *supra* by providing wine, they might travel to the town to buy the wine for their parents, might arrange Ziyarat for the dead, however the young do consider that they do a favor for their parents. The young are explicit that they are wrongdoers for the sake of their elders. And that they themselves do not or will not participate in wine drinking or doing Ziyarat. It is apparent that seniority in a traditional sense has no place here. The young do not consider the elder to be their spiritual or moral authorities. Quite the contrary, the young consider the elder to be lacking in moral and spiritual knowledge. However, many young in the village maintain the traditional manners to express and show their respect to their elders.

Some of the middle aged or elderly might express particular discontent against those young who are more “Qur’an oriented”. Another label (apart from the “Wahhabi”) older villager’s pin to the young and religiously devout members of the new mosque is that they are “Arabized”. This label covers the idea that they do not care for ethnic identity (Kist or Chechen), culture or traditions, all they care about is religion and their exclusive identity is Muslim. As Eldar in his sixties explains to me the only identity these young acknowledge is that of a “common Muslim universe ... and it is everything, it is their nationality and their culture”. Several men in their 50-60s have asserted that Kist community is

strongly based on age hierarchy where the elder is the authority figure, however, they believe that “Wahhabism” erases the age difference between the young and elder, “equalizes” them and makes them have one and only superior – Allah. They (some elders) claim that disregarding the age difference in the community where the Seniority is the fundamental value will always cause the tension in the valley. Very often the “Arabized” young are seen as explicitly hostile towards some of the local customs through their arguing with the elderly or teaching other young people that practicing them is wrong according to Islam. Therefore, “Arabized” young are often considered to be especially disrespectful for rising up their voice in front of their elders.

However, the young who are more Quran oriented do not consider themselves to be against the tradition of *upros-umcrosoba*. They believe that as long as they follow the Quran they cannot be disrespectful to the elders because the Quran teaches them about respecting others. However, their primary loyalty and obedience is towards God and his words written in the Quar’an. Therefore they perceive of an elder who expects of even demands to be obeyed in everything as arrogant and as someone who challenge the authority of God: “Those older people say ‘I am old and I know’ and then so what, you are old? Do you know better than Allah does?!” – says 29 years old Amur who got his religious education in Saudi Arabia.

Locally practiced laws: Tribal and Sharia Law

One could say that the most apparent manifestation of young challenging the authority of elders is two competing legal and moral systems in the valley which are: tribal law one the one hand (administered by “council of elders”) and Sharia court one the other (administered by the active members of the new mosque). One could also claim that Scripturalist Muslims with their Sharia court not only challenge the authority of elders and the authority of present tribal law in the valley but the former also have moral privilege upon the latter. As we will see in the section below very often the elder men council is associated with the corrupted state by local people, while Sharia court is associated with the holy book and religious Muslim morality.

In the following sections I will discuss the issue of “challenged authority” by showing how the two legal and moral systems function today in the community and what their roles are in conflict resolution processes..

Tribal Law and the “council of elders”

Leila Margoshvili, in her book *“traditions and modernity of Pankisi Kists”*, discusses the “tribal court” among Pankisi Kists. She describes the “village council” called “mehq khiel” which in Kist language means “the world council” or “the world court”. The council consists of the village wise men with a lot of experience (Margoshvili 1985: 32). (These are men who are said to be clever and foresighted, equitable and serious and who are known and respected for making clever decisions in critical situations.). The council would judge the “*av-kargi*” (this is a Georgian word which literally means “good or bad”, in this context it means deciding what is right or wrong, i.e. what is morally correct behavior, deed or action in the Valley). According to Margoshvili “traditionally Vainakh *mehq khiel* used to impose punishments and penalties; it would decide about internal or foreign trading issues or the issues related to war and peace. According to Margoshvili “it has been a long time” since *mehq khiel* was last practiced, however, she notes that a tribal court is still active in the valley. (Margoshvili 1985: 32). The role of the tribal court is to judge a dispute between two opponents. Plaintiffs would ask two “wise” elder men to be the lawyer (the lawyer had to be someone who was well informed in tribal law and who was a respectable man in the community) and the case would be judged in a khiel (court).

Khangoshvili in his book “Kists” (2005) writes that *mehq khiel* used to interfere if heavy crime would take place in the community (crimes like murder or rape) More simpler cases like arguments over possessions, bride kidnappings could be solved among the clans itself. Plaintiffs would choose the wisest men from their own clans as lawyers who would discuss and solve the issue. In the next section I will discuss the *mehk Khiel* that was recreated and established as official organization in 2013 by the elder men of the community. Currently *Mehk Khiel* is officially registered and named *Ukhutsesta Sabcho* which is Georgian for “Council of elders”.

Ukhutsesta sabcho: Present day mehk khie!

Ukhutsesta sabcho was established as an official organization in 2013 and includes over 35 elders, “respected” men from the entire valley, inhabited by Kists (As I was explained by locals *Ukhutsesta Sabcho* unofficially even existed during soviet times and of course after Soviet times). Every village in Pankisi has its representatives, in the organization. The “council of elders” also has a board of administrators which includes 11 elder men. Council members (35 elders) are mainly representatives of clans who are elected by clan members. Further decisions like electing 11 men for board of administration or electing the head of the “council of elders” is already up to members of council to make. Members of board of administration are mainly those who had good education during Soviet times and who used to work on prestigious positions during and after Soviet times As the community elders explained to me, when there is something urgent in the valley and one cannot gather all the members, it is easier to discuss it among the 11 people. Their duty is to attempt to resolve conflicts in the valley based on tribal law. In addition, they deal with other problems such as development of the valley in general and they mediate with the Georgian government and inform them about different kinds of problems in the valley (water and irrigation problems, repairing of roads, bridges, schools).

There is an opinion among the council elders that the organization is the main government in the village. However, the majority of the people in the village are not sharing the same opinion (I will discuss people’s perceptions regarding the elder council below). “Our command in the valley is like a command from president Saakashvili or Shevardnadze.” – One of the elders claims. He explains that if someone from the “top government” visits the valley, they deal with the “elder men community”. The organization has its own stamp which is used in official correspondence and regulations. Regulations mean the tribal, in theory oral laws which, however, have been recently organized as a collection of handwritten notes. The head of the community who is 84 years old even gave me a copy of the written -down tribal law which consists mainly of explanations of judgments passed in cases of thieving, murder, marriage and divorce and bride theft.

According to council elders I spoke to the “council of elders” includes only the educated, knowledgeable and prestigious elders which means that the members of council should have higher education. One prominent member of the council stressed that “Our organization only includes

educated, prestigious people, who are lawyers, teachers, people who used to work in Law Enforcement. We do not have uneducated people in the organization ... earlier there were some uneducated members in the organization but we removed those who were uneducated from the council.” He explains the importance of the “council of elders” throughout the history of the valley and points out that they had to be particularly wise and clever people. “I do not say we are better than anyone” – he explains. “But if you are a professor and you are educated you are special, distinguished from others”. Indeed, even though organization is greatly criticized by many Kists in the village (see below) some of the people (young, middle aged or elderly) might be showing quite some respect towards the members of council elders. Members of council elders might be respected as educated men and as also people who hold and spread knowledge about Kist people. Many of the council elders are those who know most about Chechen and Kist history. One of the members is even a local scholar who published a books about Kists life and history. Me as well as other researchers interested in Kists culture and traditions were usually advised by local people to talk to certain knowledgeable people who one could find were members of council. Some of the people are quite ambivalent about the council elders: they on the one hand might criticize the organization of “council of elders” (see below) on the other hand they might tell a history of the Kists based on the book and knowledge of several council elders and again might advise that if one wants to know more about Kists life he or she should ask to a certain people (who often are the council elders). Even though, council members consider themselves and are often considered by some of the Kist people to be knowledgeable and clever, in the next section I will show how their morality and knowledge (which is mainly religious knowledge) is variously questioned by different people in the village.

Locals about the “council of elders”

In the following section I would like to discuss what people think about the reinvented “*council of elders*”.

“Council of elders” in Pankisi valley is, to some extent, similar to the elder council or court of elders that is called Aksakal in parts of central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan). Aksakal is originally Turkish word that means “white beard” and is related to the respected elderly men of the

community. In Kyrgyzstan Aksakal courts were formalized after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1995 by President Askar Akaayev (Beyer 2007: 8). According to the research by Euroasia foundation Aksakal courts in Kyrgyzstan are:

“Village level institution ... responsible for resolving community-level disputes. Their responsibilities are to protect the rights of citizens by resolving disputes based on customs and traditions in accordance with Kyrgyz law... Aksakal courts are tasked with reconciling disputing parties through the use of traditional law while, simultaneously not contravening national laws” (2012: 4)

Judith Beyer in her research *“Imagining the state in rural Kyrgyzstan”* argues that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union rural areas in Kyrgyzstan became disconnected from the state: “During Soviet times the villages have been organized as one collective farm and formed part of a dense network of agricultural units. As such they were subject of the controls of the Soviet authorities” (2007: 2). Beyer argues that it was Aksakal that replaced Soviet authority in the villages. After the collapse of the Soviet Union people found state officials were quite far away to have interaction with. To sue or complain rural people need a lot of time and money to communicate with state officials, therefore as Beyer argues people in the rural areas were disconnected from the state. She claims that rural peoples were imagining the state by media and by the memories of Soviet state. Here Aksakal plays mediator role between locals and state officials and since the average villagers are unfamiliar with the state law Aksakals “stress their personal status as a knowledgeable person in the court as well as in the village” (2007: 2). Therefore Aksakal according to Beyer is respected by people in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan. In the case of Pankisi the “council of elders” obviously have the intension of playing the authoritative role in the valley, however, they do not enjoy the same degree of respect and status as authority by the people in the valley as Beyer (2007) reports for rural Kyrgyzstan. Contrary to the Aksakal in Kyrgyzstan, the “council of elders” in the Pankisi is not considered as distinct from and an alternative to State authorities, quite the contrary many people associate the “council of elders” with the state and state authority. Local people in the valley consider that Kists form an egalitarian community that should not submit to state authority but sort out problems among themselves.. According to Kists it is a big shame if someone from the community complains about something or sues someone through the state law.. They are critical towards

“council of elders” considering that council elders have ambitions to rule Kist community, represent Kist people with the Georgian state, and make decisions in the name of Kist people without the consent of the Kist people themselves. Therefore, local people instead of associating “council of elders” with the traditional *mehk khieI* they associate the council with the corrupted state authority. “They understand nothing about traditions ... they just want to profit from the state” is a comment I often heard about the council.–“They are going too far, who do they think they are?!” – says Eldar a 58 year old, quite educated man during soviet times, after he heard that the “council of elders” recommended a potential governor of the region in the name of Kist people to the Georgian state. “Do not be mistaken – 26 years old Aslan explains to me “Kist people do not respect them, they just collaborate with the Georgian government and want to make some profit ... they do not care for people or traditions”.

It is not surprising that the young usually criticize the “council of elders” for being part of a morally degraded Soviet generation. The young claim that modern day elders and especially the members of the organization do not have an education and by having no education they usually mean that they have not had a religious education. Aslan explains to me that today people do not trust the “council of elders”. he claims that to be respected, one must first of all live in a “religious way”. By living in a religious way he means that one must be going to a mosque, have some religious knowledge and must not drink wine. “They chose people who do not even go to a mosque ... who drink wine. Aslan claims that “Those kinds of people” are not respected among Kists so the organization will not have the power to rule the community.

Another opinion which is quite common in the village is that the elder council or tribal court is no longer trusted in the valley, because they are corrupted. “You will be justified if you are their man, or if you know some right people” –Marina in her middle ages claims. Some of the people do not take elder council seriously, claiming that today the council elder is nothing like as wise and clever as *Mehk KhieI* elders once were. Some people also consider the way they are doing their job, judging cases to be unserious: “Sometimes they [Traditional *Mekh KhieI*] would work on one case for a month, would try to find out everything so not to make a mistake” – 42 years old Tamaz claims. “Today they do not want to bother; they might sit for half an hour and then make a decision already”.

A reconciliation ritual is the traditional form of conflict resolution among Kists. In the case of intense conflict or when a murder happen, the council elders gather, discuss and decide how to end

the conflict between two or more sides. Minor issues like stealing or any argument between the two are judged by the “local lawyers” who are dealing with the issues according to tribal (customary) law. One of the recent major “reconciliation” that took place in the village was the attempt to resolve a conflict that started eight years ago. According to the story told by villagers the conflict started when a young boy, Ruslan, murdered (or as some would put it “accidentally murdered”) his young neighbor Aslan. Ruslan spent 8 years in prison, however, according to tribal law, the punishment given by the state doesn’t rule out the right of the victim, or his or her family, to take what is locally referred to as “the tribal revenge” and punish the culprit. In order to end the conflict, it is important to perform a traditional ritual and reconcile the victim’s family to the family of culprit.

Significance of ritual

“Reconciliation” has more of a symbolic purpose today in the valley since it is under the jurisdiction of the Georgian state law and someone who takes revenge, albeit permitted under tribal law, will be punished according to the laws of the state. One could claim that today the reconciliation tradition is modified simply because in modern day conditions it cannot play traditionally significant role as it ones did. As was the case with the tradition of *upros-umcrosoba*, reconciliation ritual as well might functions more as a matter of etiquette. The ritual as well as the Sufi leaders who play important role (going forward and making their speeches against revenge) during ritualized reconciliation procedures have more of a symbolic value, because tradition and ritual doesn’t any more have same kind of value and authority as it traditionally used to have. A good illustration of the symbolic purpose of the reconciliation procedures is a reconciliation that took place in December 2013. The incident happened nearly 10 years ago when a drunk husband killed his wife. The woman’s family lived in Chechnya and during the years there hasn’t been reconciliation. In 2013 the brother of the murdered woman visited the valley and the elder council decided to reconcile the families of the murderer and his victim.. “What kind of reconciliation was it? – says 78 years old Akhiad “they went and ask for forgiveness just once and he agreed [there is a claim among Kists that in order to reconcile elders might even go to the doors of the family of the victim for 10 times or as many times as it would need to reconcile] ... that was all ... they were not serious at all ... what’s the point of the

reconciliation at all? Indeed, one might ask what the point of reconciliation today is when the chance of revenges is quite low because of the consequences of revenge crimes enforced by the state legal system. I was told by lela, who is in her forties, that the last blood revenge took place in 2002. Others also claim that since the end of the “disturbances” (See chapter 1) blood revenges haven’t taken place. Even though there might not be any revenge at all, the ritual of reconciliation is still considered very important to practice. First of all, it is important to express community solidarity and show how important reconciliation and peace between families is for the peace and well-being of the entire valley. As part of the ritual, council elders go to the gate of the house of the victim’s family. To express the importance of family forgiveness, elders might even kneel down in front of the host – the head of the family. The speech that is delivered to convince the family of the victim to forgive the family of the perpetrator is usually given by the oldest and most respected elder. They try to convince the head of the family how much he and his family may be honored by God if he (on behalf of the family) forgives. The moral tale is that forgiving makes the victim’s family meritorious by the community, so the family has deserving excuse forgiving.

Second, performing the ritual is an investment in the future security of the community. Some Kists believe that old grievances will be remembered and with absence of state authority people will settle old scores. Indeed, Kists experienced “settling old scores” and the absence of the state during 1990s. According to Kists during the nineties many blood revenges took place. “During the disturbances people started to remember their old grievances. They found the moment to revenge” – 56 years old Tamaz claims. Therefore, some people in the village strongly believe that one day state government system will change and another “disturbances” will take place. The absence of the state will strengthen local, tribal law, therefore if there hadn’t been reconciliation for incidents, people will sometime in the future settle their scores. 25 years old Sulkhan expects that the regime will change and waits for disturbances so he can revenge the death of his cousin, who has been sued, sentenced to prison and died there of tuberculosis. “I will do something, I will not leave it like this, system will change and I will revenge” – Sulkhan claims.

Validity of Sharia Law

While reconciliation rituals and its spiritual leaders do not have actual power and many people in the valley question the honesty and morality of the “council of elder men”, the “Jamaat court”, “New mosque court” or “Sharia court” is considered to be reliable and trustworthy by many young and older people in the valley. Jamaat court (*jamaatis sasamartlo*) is established by the most active members of the new mosque, who gained some religious education in Middle Eastern countries and who established the Sharia based court in the valley. Many people are quite confident about the “seriousness” of Sharia law. While the decision making may take only half an hour with the cases discussed by tribal law, “Jamaat court” may work on a case for a month. Many people are also quite confident that people who deal with Sharia law are very precise and honest, because they deal with the holy books. Locals often say that everything that “Jamaat court” representatives say is written in the book of God. “They know if they make any mistake they will be punished, so they work very hard, day and night and check many times before they conclude something” – Eka in her forties points out (Same opinion has been expressed by many of my interlocutors young and older alike). Cases which are solved by Sharia law are mainly conflicts related to money. According to one of the stories two men established a saw mill. One man put money in the business and the other was helping (administering). Finally, they got into a huge debt. The one who put money into the business told the other that they both had to pay the debt. The other refused to do so, so the one who put money into the business sued him to the “Sharia court” in the New Mosque.

The woman, who told me this story, also explained to me that her husband used to be called as a witness many times. “He was so involved in the process; sometimes they would call him every day”. She explained to me that the process lasted a month and the court would gather for almost “every night” and very often the gathering would take all night. She claimed that at first the man who was sued didn’t want to go to a Jamaat court, because he was against that. But later he was convinced that he had to go there, because it would be a shame if he wouldn’t show up, it would be a trespass against God. Finally, he agreed and “just imagine” – she tells me “he was justified after all by Sharia law”. The husband of the woman was a witness of the one who was sued and later justified by the “Sharia court”. She explained to me that before the process her husband didn’t trust the “Jamaat court”

either, but after he saw with his own eyes how hard they work and how much they know, he changed his mind completely and became confident in them.

She also asserted that Sharia law started to be practiced two years ago (I've heard from others that they started to practice Sharia law "a few years ago") and during these two years, they dealt with five or six cases. However, when I talked to the representations of the new mosque they told me that New Mosque deals with the problems among its followers since the new mosque and Scripturalist Islam established in the village. Therefore, it is likely that at the beginning Sharia law was practiced by a closed group that later became accessible for everyone who wants to solve their problem according to Sharia law.

Another case that was solved by Sharia law was recounted by 38 years old Isidore. According to Isidore's story after one woman's husband died in the valley her stepson demanded the house in return for a very small amount of money. He explains to me that first they decided to apply the tribal law but it didn't work out. "They couldn't decide anything and everything became entangled". Later they appealed to Sharia law. "And it finished peacefully" – he tells me. But how did it end? As he explained, according to Sharia law, they decided that the widow had to get more of the inheritance and even though the stepson didn't agree, they (those who deal with the Sharia law) convinced him that according to the Sharia it was the right way, so he accepted. Isidore analyses the situation and explains to me that tribal law has problems because it lacks flexibility. He claims that they do not take into account the inflation and economic changes. "Tribal law is a precedential law. It is not flexible. They do not realize that like a thousand Lari, which was quite a bit of money 10 years ago, has no value today. Sharia law is flexible; they take into account economic changes, and in my opinion their decision was fair".

Members of the "Jamaat court" are usually quite confident and greatly aware that they are trusted by many locals in the village. They claim that they collaborate with the "Council of elders" after the council members cannot solve the problem themselves.

Ismail -one of the representatives of New Mosque mentions one more conflict that I've heard many times during my stay in the valley. The conflict started 10-15 years ago between 2 clans after a bride stealing and gradually intensified and involved some other clans as well. Abubaqr tells me that "During the years the "tribal court" was not able to end the conflict and there were wounded from one side and then from the other side over and over again. After Sharia law intervened the conflict

quietened. Do you know why? Because this is the law of God and if you do not follow it, you will not be able to hide from his punishment”.

The Islamic Jammāt court, in other words, holds moral authority among the Kist community (the punishment of God is a powerful sanction) and the resolutions made by the court is often trusted. While the “council of elders” and their reconciliation rituals have a symbolic purpose, they have as we have seen difficulties in resolving some problems and the morality and reliability of” of the council and its members are questioned in the valley and the “Jammāt court” because of its moral standing, knowledge of religious texts and powerful religious sanctions efficiently resolve family conflicts.

Sharia court is quite authoritative for the young. Osman claims that most of the young today appeal to Sharia law. However, when the conflict concerns the families and the clan then some young won’t go against the will of their parents. According to Islam, you must respect your parents; however, he claims some of them who are strongly religious might go against the will of their parents.

One of the young who criticizes “tribal court” and “Council of elders”, claims that he would, of course, appeal to the Sharia court. “I will of course use Sharia court because I know they work for justice. Everybody knows that you can get nowhere with your money and with your prestigious friends with “Sharia court”. Tribal court is corrupt and those elder men drink and some of them even have not solved the problems in their own families.” (According to Kist tradition, a respected man should first and foremost have order in in his own family.)

Collaboration between the new mosque Jamaat and the “elder men community”

“Collaboration” practice between the “council of elders” and the “Jammāt court” is an indication of the ascendancy of the new mosque sharia court. As I pointed out in the above section, after a series of unsuccessful attempts of the “council of elders” to resolve conflicts, the cases were resolved within the system of “collaboration” between the new mosque’s “Jamaat court” based on sharia and the “council of elders” reconciliation institution based on tribal law. This in effect means that cases were transferred from the “council of elders” to the “Jamaat court”. Some of the elders from the council also pointed out that if there is a case where attempted reconciliation encounter problems, they

might ask the “Jamaat court” to resolve the dispute in accordance with the Qur’an. The fact that one of the members from “council of elders” is also a member of the new mosque may facilitate collaboration between the “council of elders” and the “Jamaat court”. Omar, a devout Muslim in his fifties, keen to renew and strengthen Islam in the valley, was selected to the “council of elders” as a “religious” representative. He claims that conflicts and problems concern everyone in the village and when disputes arise people have to find a common language and deal with the problem. Even though Omar is one of the members of the “council of elders” and participates in the decision making processes and generally in village affairs, he identifies himself clearly with the new mosque Jamaat, and at the same time distances himself from the Sufis by using markers such as “their mosque”, “our Mosque”; “their Imam”, “our Imam” or even “their young”, “our young” when he argued for the privileged position of Sharia law in relation to “tribal law”. He makes a clear distinction between the “council of elders” and the “new mosque Jamaat” and places himself as a representative of the latter – not the former: “They (the “council of elders”) come to us when they cannot deal with the problems themselves. The “council of elders” might have no trust in people. Many verdicts depend on how clever and adroit the ‘lawyer’ is and they may [end up] justifying the wrongdoer. Those who do not like this come to us. They know that we have the young, the young are stainless, they are followers of God and they will not lie”.

Conclusion

The chapter is a manifestation of the idea also argued in the previous chapter that there are no simple divisions in the community between Scripturalists and others. Even though, the new mosque followers maybe labeled as “Wahhabis” in quite negative terms, “Sharia court”, leaded by the active members of the new mosque is highly trusted by many people. People in the valley express the opinion that Scripturalists are very pious, therefore they are very careful not to make mistake during judgment. People firmly believe that the decisions of Scripturalists are based on the words of God and therefore their decisions are truthful, valid and unquestionable. Qur’an and Sharia usually have unquestionable authority as words of God make functioning of the Sharia court quite efficient. Or as Marina an outspoken women in her forties put it: “Well, someone might not like the “Sharia court” decision, but he will be too scared of God to complain about it”. So while the “Sharia court” draws its

legitimacy from the holy texts and the court's members' (and interpreters of the texts) independence from state institutions and power hierarchies,

the moral and legal authority of the "council of elders" which is based on tribal traditional practices and supported by the state and thus associated with it are both questioned and challenged by both the pious and less pious people in in the valley.

Chapter 4

Women and the public sphere

In this chapter we will see that the pious and Scripturalist young and the Sharia court are not the only challenges to the traditional authority of the elder men in the valley. The voice of women and their involvement in the public sphere is also something worth paying attention to. One could claim that the activities of organized women in the valley is not only a challenge to the traditional authority of elder men, it also stands opposed to the mainstream aspirations of the young to get a religious education by strongly encouraging the local youth to get a public education. This chapter will discuss the involvement of these women in the public sphere and explore what may empower their participation in public life. The Soviet system strongly encouraged women to work and to gain education (Nantes 2005, Khalid 2007, Tohidi 1996). Soviet authorities believed that if women would work and would no longer be economically dependent on a male, gender equality would be achieved (Nantes 2005: 63). Achieving full equality in Soviet society didn't succeed (Nantes 2005). Even though the Soviet authority encouraged women to participate in all areas of intellectual and economic activities, women's role in private life remained unchanged: "The Soviet state at no time challenged the prevailing gender division of labor in the private sphere" (Nantes 2005: 66). I would also claim that in all the different Soviet areas the level of equality couldn't possibly be the same since some of the areas were especially traditional, conservative and patriarchal. For instance according to the Soviet view Central Asia was considered to be backwards, characterized by an "archaic type of female inferiority" (Nantes 2005: 35). Nantes claims that communities in Central Asia were strongly preserving the unwritten Islamic law; the Soviet system liberating and empowering the women with certain rights would cause women to become unacceptable and "outsiders" to their own community. Therefore women had to take into account the local law practices. Nantes quotes Ergasheva to show the "double burden" of Central Asian women "One to be mother and obey all unwritten laws of Islam and serve the husband's family, and the other, to get a job outside of the home" (Nantes 2005: 38) According to the life stories of Kists, the situation of Central Asian women under Soviet rule was not very far from the Pankisi situation. As Kists explain to me *adat* was very important during the Soviet times. It was a big shame for Kists to appeal to Soviet law for justice and according to the locals this did not happen, instead the problems among family, clan or community were judged by the tribal

law. What would make a woman an “outsider” during Soviet and even in contemporary Kist society- is for instance to claim the children after a divorce. According to *adat*, after a divorce or after the husband's death, if a woman remarries the children from her previous husband are going to the husband's family. According to the locals there has not been a single woman during Soviet times that appealed to Soviet law where the mother's right to her children took precedence in order to claim her children. There is a story however, told by a few Kists, about one woman who recently applied to state law and claimed her children. The woman's action was denounced by local Kists for being shameless and for “raising” her voice against the *adat*. The woman of that story does not live in Pankisi anymore, she and her new husband (also a Kist man) moved to another Georgian village. It is quite apparent that the woman dared to raise her voice because she had already planned to leave the community.

The situation for Kist women corresponds to Nantes description of central Asian women who had to obey *adat* in private life but also were to participate in the public sphere by working and gaining education. Tohidi, on the example of Azeri women claims that the women under Soviet rule were “Azeri in private” and “Soviet in public” (Tohidi 1996). My interest here is to suggest that the Soviet (gender) egalitarian educational and labor system and the system that encouraged women to participate in the public sphere affected Kist women and that Soviet liberating politics towards women left a legacy that is expressed in Pankisi valley today.

Even though Soviet women were free to choose any field of education or occupation there were not a broad career choice for Kist women. Kist women had to choose from a set of quite limited options acceptable for a woman living in the Kist community. The available career options were mostly to become a teacher or a nurse; becoming a doctor was also acceptable as well as prestigious since one had to be especially bright and hard working to be accepted to medical school. Preferences for becoming a teacher or a nurse for Kist women was also about not needing to leave the valley. They could stay in the valley and work in local schools or hospitals after graduating Universities mostly in the capital city - Tbilisi or in the nearest town – Telavi. Asmath, a woman in her forties and one of my key interlocutor tells me that her dream was to become a journalist, however she got married the same year she had to take the exams to enter the university. She explains to me that for her as a married woman it was especially *ulamazo* (a Georgian word, meaning not nice or unacceptable behavior) to study journalism which would mean that after graduating University she, most probably,

had to leave the village and work in town or in a city. “Then I just decided to become a teacher, so I could work in the village school” – she says. Asmat received her degree by studying privately, which was quite common during Soviet times and which meant that one didn’t have to attend classes but study at home. He or she only had to be present in University during exam times.

Today most of the teachers (15-20) in village school are women, greatly outnumbering the male teachers, of which there are only a few. Most of the women are middle aged or elderly, which means they represent the generations who gained their education during Soviet times in the Georgian capital Tbilisi or in a closer city - Telavi. The school director as well as deputy director is female and most educational arrangements (excursions, school festivals, etc.) are done by women since all teachers of history or Georgian literature are women (while the men give classes in arts and crafts or in sport). Some of these teachers are also members of the “women’s committee” which I will discuss below.

The Committee of Women

To think of women who are involved in social activities today in the region one could definitely consider such women to be those who are working in the non-governmental organization called ‘the “committee of women”. The “committee of women” consists of 12 women who represent all the villages in the valley. They are mostly middle aged women with a college education. Some of them work also as teachers in the village school.

The office of the organization is in the village “club” (as locals call it) or the “culture house” of the village. The “culture house” arranges different activities for the young, like trips to the city (Tbilisi) and cultural places of the Kakheti region; sports competitions (Table tennis, Chess); girls can learn how to work on thick felt and one can buy different things hand made by children in the “club”. The women’s council is actively involved in organizing these different kinds of activities. They also organize different kinds of educational or entertaining arrangements. For instance, they organized and hosted Georgian musicians in the village, and they celebrated New Year's Day in the “club”.

Apart from organizing different educational activities for the young, the “committee of women” tries to give voice to the women in the valley. The aim of the organization is to defend the minimum

of rights they have according to tribal law. The committee women claim that the organization was established (it was supported by Kakheti regional development foundation - KRDF) with the purpose of taking into consideration women's rights. They assert that previously everything was decided by men; that they were deciding everything according to their point of view and didn't take women's needs and views into consideration.

The "Women's committee" mainly works on cases that concern women's rights after divorce. Cases can be about property distribution and the right of the mother to see her child. Kist women explain to me that according to Kist tradition a women have a right to see her children, yet often the husband and his family deny her this right. Zaira in her forties tells me about an issue which was solved by neither the "Council of elders" nor by the "Jamaat court". The issue was solved thanks to the women's committee's hard effort; on the one hand they were calming the mother down who was not allowed to see her child, on the other hand they tried to convince the husband's family how important a mother is in a child's life until they finally came to an agreement. The members of the women's committee observe that at the beginning women from the villages in the valley were hesitant to ask for their advice and assistance, however, gradually as they become less skeptical and better informed about the group's work they have become increasingly open to contacting them to seek help with their problems.

Committee women even claim that their organization played a role in establishing the "council of elders". Nestan, a forty-four year old women's committee member claims that it would be "uncomfortable" if only a women's committee existed. That would mean that women 'jump over' (meaning that women are showing disrespect towards men by their independent activities).. Therefore the head of the women's committee took the initiative for a meeting of elder men in the community and encouraged them to establish an organization that is today the "council of elders". Committee women have explained to me that their decisions are usually made in consultation and agreement with the "council of elders". They stress that they would not make any decision which is against the will of the "council of elders".

Most of the committee women are leading a secular life. Most of them wear only a simple headscarf and dress like average Georgian middle aged women. They care much about education. Most of them have children who study or graduated from universities in the city (Tbilisi). Women's participation in such committees is common practice also in the rural areas of some of the Central Asian countries.

The Eurasia foundation in one of its reports claims that the “counterparts to Aksakal courts (see chapter 3) are women’s committees” (2012: 12). Women committees were first introduced under the Soviet government and as it is asserted in the above mentioned research was quite strong during Soviet times. Women’s committees in for instance Kyrgyzstan have been focusing on problems related to women (divorce, domestic violence) and youth like it is also the case with the women’s committee in the Pankisi valley. However, committee of women was not established during Soviet times in the valley. It was created in independent Georgia quite a while after the system collapsed. It is no surprise that women committee members are mainly those who are educated under the Soviet system and whose lifestyle are quite influenced by the Soviet times. Today, one could relate the activities of the “committee of women” to the civic engagement as it refers to “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern”¹. Civic engagement usually aims to develop knowledge skills, values and motivation to make the difference in community. The committee which is more secular oriented and concentrates on the raising the awareness of the young to get a public education, raising the awareness of women them to know more about their rights. The “committee of women” one could say challenges the religious modernity today in the valley. Scripturalist young often might be defined by the council women to be “too much into religion” or religious fanatics who for the women might means being backward and making no progress and development in life. Some of the women in the council (as well as some other middle aged people in the village) believe that the young people who follow the “new understanding of Islam” have chosen to live a “backward” life and simply reject anything that they think is not Islamic: no interest in getting an education or learning about anything else than Islam, forbidding everything that makes life enjoyable or is something educational: not listening to any other music than Arabic ..., not watching TV, rejecting to play entertaining games (domino, cards, backgammon).

At the *supra*, where mainly the council women were gathered, one of the women in her forties made an emotional comment about the young and their life today in the valley stressing the “religious fanaticism” and “brainwash” (as she called it) of the young. She referred to the followers of Scripturalist Islam to have almost animal like lives.

¹ American Psychological Association, Civic engagement

- *“Tall me, tall me what kind of life they have? They do not want to know anything, tall me what do they enjoy? No music, no TV, is it only sex what they enjoy? They waste their youth!”* – She asserts.
- *“Leave them alone Inga”* – interrupts another woman in her forties – *“they have their truth, their understanding and their way, this is brought by time, nothing special is happening”*.
- *“What truth? What understanding?”* –the woman continues emotionally – *“Should I understand that a 16 year old girl tells me that she wants to go to Syria and die fighting for Islam?!”*

“Proper” Muslim women

The council women with their activities contrast themselves from the women who orient themselves (or are influenced by their male family members) towards a religious way of life. Several middle aged women have complained that many young girls today marry “Wahhabis” and after that they stop studying, start to wear hijab and lock themselves up in their houses. This sentiment is, however, criticized by one of the teachers who herself is quite negative towards Scripturalist young. She claims that “Wahhabis” has nothing to do with the fact that the young do not study well, quite the contrary: “those who are real Wahhabis” (she means those who gained their education in Muslim countries) encourage their wives to get an education. As an example she talks about the wife of one of the representative of the new mosque who is doing her PhD in medicine at the Tbilisi state Meedical University. “The young themselves do not want to study, it is not right for people to blame Wahhabis for the fact that girls do not study” – she claims. Indeed, there are quite a few women (especially those who are wives of “Quran oriented” young) who has or has been gaining education. One of the girls who is in her thirties also gained religious education in Syria with her brother. Now she is married to one of the quite an active member of the new mosque whom she met in Syria.

Nevertheless, there have been some women or girls who had to reject some of the activities they used to be involved in after becoming pious Muslims or they had to leave education after they got

married to pious men. Nana who is forty years old and who is the wife of one of the representative of the new mosque talks about her transformation from the “wrong” (Soviet influenced) way of life to the “correct” religious and moral way of life. Nana used to work as a music teacher, however after becoming a pious Muslim she refused to play or give piano classes to others. She proudly asserts that she has changed her lifestyle and became a more obedient and modest woman. She covers herself with the Muslim hijab and refuses to leave the house without asking her husband for permission.

In order to become a “proper” Muslim Zarikha too had to completely change her lifestyle. Indeed, Zarikha used to love dancing and singing, however, after she was introduced to the teachings of the Qur’an by her younger relatives, she decided that her lifestyle was wrong religiously, therefore she left her dance and singing classes, started to wear hijab and reading the Qur’an. “I used to dance very well, I’ve been on a stage also several times ... and I loved stylish clothes (meaning short skirts, pants) but according to our religion it is not acceptable” – she explains to me.

There are quite a few stories about girls who have decided to quit studying, or participating in some activities (especially activities involving music or dancing) after they are married or decide to become “proper” Muslims. However, one cannot claim that followers of Scripturalist Islam are discouraging young women from gaining an education. However, “new Understanding of Islam” can discourage the young from certain activities (for instance being involved in singing or dancing as we discussed above). Absence of the pious Muslim women from the public sphere (for instance in schools as teachers or as members of the, “committee of women”) is quite striking. Some women followers of the new more pious understanding of Islam has pointed out that there is no necessity for the “committee of women” in the valley, since women have many rights according to the Qur’an and the Qur’an is the guarantee for women’s protection. Pious women are also absent from the mosque. Some of them have claimed that it is not necessary for woman to go and pray in the mosque. However, they often consider it (not being present in mosque) as an advantage for women. “Muhammad sets women free from going to mosque ... he doesn’t oblige them to go to mosques”. Scripturalist men have the same opinion and claim that it is not important for women to go to the mosque and that they can pray at home. Several pious Muslim men even suggested that the women’s place is at home with children and that they have no place in a mosque.

Sufi women

Compared with Scripturalist women, Sufi women are quite engaged in spiritual activities on equal terms with Sufi men. As I have also discussed in chapter two, Sufi women are engaged in *ziyارات*. Both Sufi *wirds* have their woman leaders, who are also responsible for the ritual of washing the body of dead females. However, just as is the case with their male counterparts female Sufi leaders no longer have the spiritual authority in the village, as they once had during Soviet times.

Even though there were no women's committee during Soviet times in the Pankisi valley and "committee of women" as an organization of women might be an unusual practice among Kists, it is not very uncommon for locals to have women involved in decision making processes in the valley alongside men during the Soviet times. During my stay in the village people would always mention two "great" and "special" women who were so respected and their opinion mattered so much that men would call on them to participate in the "tribal court". This kind of practice during the Soviet era was indeed unusual since traditionally Kist women were kept away from public arenas and arenas where formal power was exercised. Both women – Taso and Aldznei - are associated with religion as well. Taso was the head of the Naqshbandi (Sheikh *wird*) tariqa while Aldznei was the leader of Qadiriyya (Haji *wird*) tariqa. They were leaders of the "*wirds*" at the same period and they were both called on by "elder men" during decision making processes in the valley. Some people (usually middle aged women) even claim that the two women were members of the "council of elders" together on an equal footing with the male members. When talking about unsolved cases that have caused victims, some of my interlocutors claim that if Taso (or Aldznei) were alive they wouldn't allow such a tragedy to happen (meaning the recent tragedy related to a murder, see chapter 3); they would have stopped it before it happened.

Eto - Taso's daughter – told me how her mother used to give charities to poor people. "My mother was a very different kind of woman, indeed she was different" – she says. She claims that even though her mother died 12 years ago, often when people meet the daughter they still console her about her mother and express their sadness that she died. Eter is knitting hats (traditional Georgian or Chechen) and other souvenirs. Those souvenirs are sold in Tbilisi souvenir shops. Eter adopted the knitting practice from her mother who was also practicing it.

“How come you’ve never heard about her? There are almost legend-like stories about her” – one of my young interlocutors expressed his surprise when I told him I had never heard of Aldznei. There is indeed a legend-like story about Aldznei that she saved the mosque in the village. According to the story once Soviet authorities came into the village to destroy the mosque. Aldznei “lied down in front of the mosque in the mosque yard and didn’t allow them to destroy it”- the story goes.

Conclusion

One could claim that during Soviet times women who engaged in social activities were also greatly engaged in spiritual activities. Now, in the post-Soviet era, women who participate in social activities and who are represented in the public sphere are more secular oriented, and one can claim they are greatly influenced by the Soviet way of life. At the same time, one can also claim that women who are involved in the “committee of women” are, to some extent, responding to the civic values of progress and modernity by raising awareness among local women by informing and educating them about the rights they have; they discourage young girls from early marriages, inspire them to gain public education and take part in different activities and they strongly encourage women to raise up voices against violence. The women involved in social activities one could claim challenge the religious modernity in the village. Some of these women criticize the young to be backward because of their religious understandings and complain that the young are not interested in gaining (public) education.

“Proper” Muslim women are evidently absent from the public sphere, moreover pious Muslim women are also absent from the public spiritual engagements. “Women don’t need to pray in a mosque” is an often heard assertion, both pious men and women use it to claim that it is not important for women to go to the mosque and engage in spiritual activities there, they can pray at home. However, as I described above many pious women might consider absence from the mosque as an advantage of women, stating that women have been set free by Islam by having been given the right to pray at home. As I also described above some of the pious Muslim women consider the “women committee” unnecessary and claim that there is a Qur’an that greatly defends the women rights.

Chapter 5

Pankisian modernity

In chapter two I mentioned that in Central Asian countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union governments strongly supported Sufi Islam to revive as national heritage while at the same times strongly discouraged other “suspicious” religious expressions. Therefore, Scripturalist Islam in some of the Central Asian countries didn’t have a chance to develop.

As we will see in this chapter, even though Kists at the outset were very suspicious of and skeptical towards the young Scripturalist Muslims in the valley , this pious religious direction gradually became accepted by many people in the village.

In the chapter below I will some up the points which could have tall about the possible reasons that conditioned acceptance of followers of Scripturalist Islam by many people in the village. Another issue I will discuss is why did a revival of religious engagement of faith and devotion not happen through the already existing tariqas? ” Sufi Islam has been the religious direction already present in the valley, yet Sufism remains a force mainly as cultural heritage for local people, something that belongs to the past, and not a force of renewal. Below I will explore the question of why a revival of religious engagement and of faith and devotion did not happen through the already existing *tariqas* as it happened in the post-Soviet independent Central Asian countries.

Getting know the “other”

Louw in her book (2007) describes the image Central Asian countries’ governments created of “Wahhabis”, and the image Central Asian people have developed in their minds. The image represents “Wahhbis” as “external elements”, dangerous others who have nothing to do with the country’s history and culture. Indeed, Pankisians seem to have had a similar image of Scripturalists when they first appeared in the valley. However, what I would like to show in the following section is how this image has gradually changed as and the pious young gradually became accepted and even in some contexts perceived of in a positive sense People often recall how it was when the “Wahhabis” first appeared in the valley at the end of 1990s. They (mostly middle aged or older generations)

describe their behavior as arrogant and aggressive. “New understanding of Islam” is thought to be imported from Chechnya during the Russia – Chechen wars in the 1990s. Many Kists, after spending 5 to 10 years in Chechnya came back to the valley mainly after the second Russia – Chechen war started in 1999. Those Kists came back quite changed: long beard, bald head and with different values than the ones they held before leaving the valley. Young Kist refugees together with young Chechen refugees seem to appear quite alienated from the local Kists who started to look at the young refugees as “others”. Often, their (Scripturalists’) activities were connected to something mysterious and scary. When they first appeared they rented one of the houses in the village, built a three meters high fence around it and started to gather there. Most shocking for the (older) Kist population appeared to be when their sons and grandsons started to “preach” to them, telling their seniors that their religious practices are not correct according to Islam. People also talked about how old sacred places were destroyed (detonated) by the “Wahhabis”. Famous incident is the pulling down of the cross from Jokholo church. However, today the cross is still on the church. As people from Jokholo claim, after the cross had been pulled down, a storm started and it didn’t stop until the cross was raised back into place.

Even though I spent only a week in Duisi in 2010¹, I could notice some differences 3 years later when I returned to the village. The topic of “Wahhabism” 3 years ago seemed generally to be more discussed in negative terms; people were mostly talking about how “Wahhabis” are corrupting their young and inciting and deceiving them with their money. The previous imam of the old mosque, who had died since my 2010 visit, was quite radical in his views of the new religious understanding in the valley. He claimed that those who wouldn’t share the values of the community should be punished – they should be excluded from the community. “We will not go to their funerals, we will not raise our voices for them ... we will not help them if anything bad is happening to them”. People today are talking about how the previous imam of the old mosque was wise, some even claim that he was educated in religion and had been to Mecca. Some people even claim he knew some Arabic. Some people claim that the new imam of the old mosque is not like the previous one, he doesn’t understand much of religion. Apparently the previous imam of the old mosque had quite some authority among people while the new imam of the old mosque is often perceived to be frivolous and

¹ worked as a field assistant with Maria Louw who was doing her research about tariqas.

not knowledgeable. “He allows other people to see their *zikh* ritual, while the old Imam would never allow that, he was strict” – says one of the elderly. People today look at the *zikh* rituals as an artistic performance rather than something sacred and spiritual (see chapter two).

It is quite likely that the attitude of Scripturalists towards Sufies could have also changed to some extent. For instance the imam of the new mosque sounded quite critical and rigid during the interview in 2010 when talking about Sufism in the village. He called the Sufi followers “backwards” and “ignorant”. “Those elders are backwards, having no knowledge ... the young today are gaining the education and they know what is correct according to religion and what is not”. However, during the interview in 2013 the new mosque imam (the same as in 2010) was less critical and rigid in his words, he no longer used words like “backwards” or “outdated” when he talked about Sufis.. “They have their understanding of what is correct and we have our understanding, nothing is wrong with that” - he claims. He also pointed out that there are only a few elders who are still very negative towards him and his likeminded: “we are friendly towards them ... they are also friendly towards us ... there are only few elderly who still ...” – he said smilingly.

On a Bajram day in 2013, the young Scripturalists (the imam and others) were visiting the Sufi elders door to door to greet them a blessed Bajram. The Sufi elders were meeting them, shook their hands and greeted them back. Today the Sufi imam, even though he still defends traditional Islam, claims that the young do have knowledge of the holy book. His wife claims that most of what the “Wahhabis” claim is true and to cover with a hijab for women is the correct Islamic way. “We all are supposed to be covered like that, it is the correct Muslim way” she said. On questions why this or that is correct Islam she would get embarrassed though and reply “I do not have good answers for that, ask them in the new mosque”. The Sufi imam and his wife - Asmat are quite friendly with their Scripturalist relatives (Nana and Omar) in their middle ages. The wife of the Sufi Imam drinks coffee and gossips with her relative Nana who sometimes preaches to Asmat about the correct Islam. Omar also a few times jokingly point out how he advises his cousin (Sufi Imam) to leave the old, outdated beliefs and join them in the new mosque.

Many people (young, middle aged or older generations) in the valley use the Georgian expression “kaci ikhav kacuri da sadac ginda ilotseo” meaning that the main thing is that you are “a man” (meaning a man who is honest, generous, and courageous) and it doesn’t matter where and how you pray.

Today one can notice the difference between the Followers of “new understanding of Islam” when they first appeared in the region and the Scripturalists today (see chapter 2) (even though some of those are of course the same who first appeared in the valley (since many of the Kist refugees remained in the valley) and were labelled “Wahhabi” by people). People do not call the new mosque followers aggressive or arrogant anymore and if they do, they will add that this is how they were, this is how they appeared. Many people claim that the young in the valley today are very modest: “they do not drink or smoke, they do not steal ... they are not 'standing on a wrong path”. Some of the people proudly even say that “their young” are special and do not look like the young in the rest of the country, who are in their opinion less modest and less religious. People often claim that the Pankisi valley has the lowest crime rate in the country. “Pankisi is the most peaceful place” – some of the people have claimed. Many people have claimed “at the beginning I was also against them ... but now I see that they are on the right way”. Many people still point out that they are against “Wahhabis” but at the same time they point out that the young “Wahhabis” have many positive characteristics.

The new mosque today has a lot of followers. Men must not have a long beard and bald head to be allowed in the new mosque. More and more young who have no association with most active followers of a Scripturalist approach to practiced Islam have started to pray in the new mosque. Some of them are simply loved by the village people for being great young people - “they go to the mosque to pray and to be believers” – some of the people claim. Some people today do not label these young pious people “Wahhabis”, instead they just say that the young today are “proper” Muslims. For some people, as I also discussed in chapter two, “Wahhabis” are even perceived of in a positive sense (in the sense of religious and modest). Yet, in spite of this many people in the valley do remain ambivalent about the active Scripturalist approach towards practiced Islam: on the one hand they appreciate that the young are religious and modest, however, on the other hand they might also consider them “too strictly religious “.

Why Scripturalism?

In the Introduction, I briefly pointed out the strong connection between religion and nationality after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his book *"Defending the Border"* Mathijs Pelkmans (2006) claims that converting to Christianity was for some Ajarians a statement that they were Georgians and they wanted to be part of Georgia's modern future. He suggests that in Ajara Christianity became linked to modernity (see also chapter one). But what happened in the Pankisi case? As I also explained in the Introduction Kists are descendants of Chechens, speaking the Chechen language and following Chechen customs or *adat*. For those reasons they didn't see themselves included in the Georgian nation-state building process which was anchored in the Georgian language and Christian Orthodox Church. The small Kist community too underwent a self-determination process where their nationality as Chechens became strongly connected to religion. Significant role in Kists self-determination as Chechens and their attachment to Islam had to have intensified interactions between Kists and Chechens after dissolution of Soviet Union when Kists started to cross the borders to Chechnya to seek for better economic conditions. As I pointed out in the first chapter some of the young Kists (who are now in their forties and fifties) found their Scripturalist inspirations in Chechnya. After second Russian-Chechen war broke out and Kists together with Chechen refugees came to the valley, they imported the knowledge of Islam from Chechnya that was especially influential for the young people. These migration processes one could claim strengthened the religious sentiments, inspired the young people with the new way of understanding Islam, that followed a situation that in the Pankisian context being Chechen/Kist also became to mean being Muslim. I would argue that for young Kists in particular it was the Scripturalist Islam that was seen as a "promise of a modern future" (Pelkmans, 2006: 142-168). Thus for the young people in the Pankisi valley, it was turning towards a revived Islam and not Christianity as in the Ajarian case that represented the promise of modernity.

The young in the valley believed they gained freedom from the Soviet religious ignorance and moral degradation their "fathers" used to suffer from (see chapter two and three). The young believe that their knowledge and lifestyle are based on the book of God and that therefore they have a correct, reasonable and rational basis on how to behave and how to conduct their lives. They have answers for everything they do and they believe those answers are valid and reasonable because they

come from the book. What the young oppose is the backwardness, primitiveness and irrationality of the elders who believe they have to follow some religious belief or traditions because their ancestors were doing so. “Our ancestors were backwards, should we be backward, too, and follow everything our ancestors were doing?” –asks Dato, a young person very eager to know more about religion. Some of the young believe that following the ancestor’s path without questioning why and without reasonable explanation is causing narrow mindedness and ignorance.

What the young also oppose is the Soviet degradation of their “fathers” generation when their parents were forbidden to practice their religion. This period in the life-history of their parents and grand-parents is perceived by the young as the condition of “being in darkness” and living immoral lives.

There are quite a few examples of post-Soviet Muslim countries whose revival of religious engagement of faith has been happening through Sufism. As Adeeb Khalid (2007) claims in his book *“Islam after communism”*, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in central Asian countries “Sufism has experienced a considerable revival locally” (2007: 119). He claims that Sufism revival was supported by the “new regimes” and the “national heritage” of Sufism was reinforced by the new central Asian governments as a part of their nationality and as a way to oppose “radical” Islam movements in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union “radical Islamist” groups appeared at the political scene (Louw 2007: 25). Maria Louw explains that they were radical because “they called for a radical change to the social, political and moral order, including the secular nature of the Central Asian states”. Radical Islamists considered the governments and government sponsored spiritual administration to be corrupted and “spiritually bankrupt” and tried to fight against them. Khalid (2007) as well as Louw (2007) describe how, as governments fought against radical Islamists, radical Islam became associated with “savagery” which has nothing in common with the Central Asian people and history. Radical Islamists, as I also referred above, were represented as “external elements”, “foreigners”, in contrast to Sufism in the region which was associated with an indigenous humanist tradition that is peaceful and that is opposed to “‘scholastic’ ‘fanatical’ or ‘orthodox’ Islam”. (Khalid 2007: 121). In Maria Louw refers to Khalid and claims that central Asian governments strongly positioned themselves on the side of “reason, enlightenment and secularism” against “fanaticism, obscurantism and reaction”. (Louw, 2007: 31) Khalid also uses the term “backward” to define how central Asian governments perceived of radical Islamists.

In the Pankisi valley the form of Islam and the teachings of Pankisian Scripturalists are often described by the young (and some older people as well) as “enlightening”, “correct” and associated with reason or as “rational”, and seen as in opposition to the perceived backward, ignorant and irrational teachings of the Sufis. (There are, however, some people as I discussed in chapter two who question the “progressiveness” and “enlightenment”) Yet, most of the people consider Sufi followers as backward and ignorant, while new mosque followers are those who possess the religious knowledge and who have answers and explanations for “everything” concerning religion (though the correctness of these answers are also questioned by some people, See chapter two). And finally the questions I will answer as a conclusion of the thesis are: how did the “new understanding of Islam” spread and become authoritative in the Pankisi valley, and why did Sufism fail to spearhead a forward-looking spiritual revival movement which could symbolize a new era of religious and individual freedom in an independent post-Communist Georgia?

If one asks the young or any other person in the village what issues the new mosque decides according to Sharia law, they will invariably say “only small issues”. Some young have pointed out that they live on “others’ land” or Georgian land and they cannot establish “Muslim law in a Christian country”. They would explain that for instance bride theft in Islam is even a worse crime than to kill a man but such cases cannot be judged according to Sharia law in Pankisi Gorge. Therefore, even though the new mosque followers indeed possess spiritual authority and indeed have an influence on the social and moral aspects of the community, they do not have legitimate power to make radical changes (To establish a Sharia law in community). The young in Pankisi criticize the religious ignorance of the people, the Soviet and secular “degradation” and corruption in Pankisian politics (for instance allegations about nepotism and unfairness among the elder men). In the Pankisian context Scripturalists can preach and discuss about what Islam is and what is correct according to Islam, but they cannot demand changes from the community because Sharia law only had/have limited applicability. Its application and validity is circumscribed by the Georgian state legal system, therefore “Jamaat court” cannot intervene in criminal cases and only act as a mediator in smaller conflicts among community. I would argue that the impossibility or inability of the Scripturalists to be involved in Political Islam (Ideology, holding that Islam should guide personal, social and political life) could be the important reason that enabled the Scripturalist Islam to become the dominant religious engagement and to be accepted by many people. Many young (as well as quite a few middle

aged) today claim that it would have been indeed proper and correct to have an entirely Sharia and Qur'an guided society, however, at the same time they point out that they do not have any right to establish Islamic jurisdiction on a Georgian land which they define as a "Christian country". "We live on another people's land, we cannot demand for our laws" – 32 years old Aslan explains. The revival of Islam generally and of Scripturalist Islam in particular has never posed a threat to the Georgian state as it has never challenged the legitimacy of (secular) democratic, Georgian state institutions. Therefore, contrary to what has been the case in Central Asian countries where political Islam may be a vehicle for challenging the secular but undemocratic and authoritarian state, there has been no need in the Georgian case to suppress and repress revivalist Islam. So this also explains why Sufism didn't succeed in maintaining its role as the dominant spiritual engagement in the valley as happened in many other post-Soviet countries. I suggest that this is because Sufism didn't have any support from the state. Georgia is a post-Soviet Christian country whose aim is to reinforce Christianity as a part of Georgian people's nationality. As a result, Kists in Pankisi have been, so to say, "left alone". Kists, at one point have had the "freedom" to choose their desired way of religious engagement. However, "freedom" here is still defined by accessibility. What one could argue is that Pankisian Kists do not have easy access to Sufi teachings, while Scripturalist Islam is more universal and easily accessible to Muslims around the world. Sufism is encouraged and state sponsored in Central Asian secular countries, as Khalid claims "in post-Soviet central Asia the public space remains de-Islamized and therefore profoundly secular". He calls for the term "religious minimalism" borrowed from Privratsky where this term refers to a practiced Islam that is not based on "textual authority" but on custom and tradition. It is quite obvious that Sufism which represents the national heritage of the people in post-Soviet countries and exists in a secular space cannot really transcend borders¹ in the way that Scripturalist Islam can. The latter is a "text centered" Islam that can form "imagined communities" across the borders. In people's quest for spirituality after the collapse of the Soviet Union Scripturalist Islam would have been inspirational since it is originated from the land of Islam (Saudi Arabia) and it is text- oriented on the Quran, Sharia and Hadiths which give answers to "all

¹ One shouldn't forget to point out the history of Sufism and the role of Sufism in missionary activities throughout the Muslim world in order to spread Sufi Islam practices (Louw 2007: 45). However Maria Louw talks about Political involvement of Naqshbandi order of Sufism before establishing the Soviet Union and points out about close relationships between Naqshbandi and ruling classes. However today Sufi Islam exists in Secular states. Louw claims that "Naqshbandi teachings have been brought forward in post-Soviet official discourses as proper national and semi – secular Muslimness" (Louw 2007: 47) where if Sufies show the particular sentiments towards religion they might be suspended in religious extremism.

the questions”, also those that hadn’t been answered before. One can, therefore claim that collapse of the Soviet Union brought a crisis of authority; a crisis of religious knowledge and a crisis of spiritual and moral authority. Scripturalist Islam, one could argue, filled a need for new authoritative knowledge.

As we have seen Sufi Islam, for the young, is associated with the “abominable” Soviet times and religious ignorance. In contrast to that the Pious Islam is something inspirational associated with freedom and bravery. “New understanding of Islam” for the young is often associated with the Chechen warriors, the heroes, who have been fighting for the freedom of their land until death while they associate Sufi Islam with the corrupted leaders of the old social and political order. “Do you know why they [followers of Scripturalist Islam] are annihilated? – One of the young men asked “it is because, they were not “sold” for money ... they fought till death”.

Pursuing a Scripturalist Islam enables the young to challenge the traditional authority of their elders. “text-centered” Islam can be argued to be a valid excuse to refuse some of the traditions and to call for changes. The “correct way” of religious engagement is what is “written in the Quran” to be; therefore those who pursue the “path of Quran” means gaining religious authority. The elders have expressed their sense of insecurity when their knowledge was challenged in debates with the new mosque followers. One of the elders with quite negative sentiments towards “Wahhabism” expressed his sense of loss of authority in the following way: “When they talk , they quote from the Quran and when you do not know about it, you feel oppressed, because you have no answer, you do not know what they are talking about to argue against it.” –. The young in turn often claim (as already suggested), that the elders usually do not dare to argue when they are faced with the knowledgeable young who point to specific verses in the Qur’an to support each claim to knowledge they make: “I will show them [the elders] from the Qur’an that what they say is wrong” is how the young devout Muslims in the village explained how they challenged their elders on issues concerning Islam.

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