“NESTED LIMINALITIES”: DEATH, MIGRATION AND PANDEMIC AMONG GEORGIANS IN RUSSIA

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«Liminalidades anidadas»: muerte, migración y pandemias entre los georgianos en Rusia

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"Nested Liminalities": Death, Migration and Pandemic among Georgians in Russia

Ketevan Gurchiani[1] and Mariam Darchiashvili[2]

In July 2015, the mother of a young man who died in Russia was waiting at Tbilisi airport for his body to arrive. There was no corpse on the plane. The shipping company had accidentally sent the body to South Korea treating it as cargo. It took some time to find and bury the deceased. Later, when the case was presented to the court, heavy damages were imposed on the company because the shipping company had "violated the deceased's mother's dignity and she had suffered emotional pain" (Chitashvili, 2017: 198).[3] Her son being handled as cargo was a painful experience for her. The funeral was postponed. The Chamber also noted that proper mourning of the deceased and bidding farewell on the last journey is a well-established tradition in Georgian society. According to the Chamber, "the plaintiff's right to free development includes the right to mourn and say goodbye to her deceased son in accordance with existing Georgian traditions'" (Chitashvili, 2017: 199). The idea of a "proper funeral" is linked to the dignity of the deceased and to the dignity of the mourner, which, in the context of Georgian Christian practices, is often connected to the possibility of mourning the deceased at home, near the body, in a familiar environment although exceptionally arranged for the rituals, in the company of relatives and neighbours. During conversations with Georgian migrants living in different countries like Germany, USA or Russia, we noted that the migratory context generates three major death-related grievances. Firstly, most migrants mention the fact that when they die, they may not be given a funeral that celebrates their life while ensuring a certain continuity of existence after/despite their death. They worry about not receiving a "proper funeral". Secondly, they are worried that nobody will visit their grave: they fear being posthumously forgotten and/or lonely. Thirdly, they are concerned with not being able to mourn collectively with friends and family in case their loved ones die in Georgia. They fear being separated from the collective experience of bereavement, cut off from the networks of kinship and friendship that are usually reactivated at these particular moments, and thus

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[3] Decision of the Chamber of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court of Georgia 2015, September 10th.

unable to move out of the liminal state that bereavement implies. The incapacity to properly mourn a loved one, the fear of not being given a proper wake, of being forgotten, or the fear of being stuck in an emotional "in-betweenness", take on a particular acuity in the context of migration.

The context of death in migration can in fact be characterised as a set of nested liminalities. We use the term "nested liminalities" to refer to layers of liminalities that are arranged like different levels on a scale.[4] Each level of liminality has a starting point of normality (for temporary entry into liminality) and an endpoint of normality (to exit liminality). The first, smallest, acutely activated level of liminality is that of death. Death rituals turn normality upside down and allow the transition to a new mode of existence (De Witte, 2001). The second layer of liminality stems from being a migrant in a state of uncertainty and in-betweenness. Scholars link the insecurity of migration to being out of ordinary, as is typical for liminality in rites of passage (Chavez, 1992: 4-6; Genova and Zontini, 2020; Gold, 2019).[5] The largest layer of liminality is the exceptional circumstances created by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic too turned normality upside down. It affected travel and personal contact, and, most importantly, created vulnerable bodies, which may be prone to contaminate and to be contaminated — thus, migrants and the circulation of dead bodies were considered major clusters of contagion. The nested liminalities act like a channel allowing the stable parts of rituals to permeate through while more unstable elements are discarded.[6] The entire process tests and reaffirms networks back home. As Strathern (1996: 523) explains, networks have "fragile temporality. They do not last forever; on the contrary, the question arises how they are sustained and made durable". The migration, and its duration in time, make the networks (human and non-human) even more fragile. This analysis will show how death in turn gives an opportunity for reclaiming localised networks in a home country and thereby, enables to mitigate some of the lived liminalities. In cases where migrants die abroad and are repatriated to Georgia, as well as in distant mourning when a relative dies in Georgia, one can witness processes of reintegration into networks that had been loose for some time, because of geographical separation. Our paper seeks to explore this two-sided phenomenon, when death "at distance" enhances liminal states of migrants, and when on the contrary, it allows them to reintegrate networks rooted in Georgia.

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[4] When we look at these layers of liminalities, applying the logic of fractal recursivity, we can see that each level is a version of another albeit on a scale. With Gal (2016: 92), in fractal recursivity we mean the repeated application of "same qualitative distinction at many levels of inclusiveness, creating (roughly) self-similar categories of contrast". Gal notes: "It is appropriately called recursive because the same distinction is applied again and again to a set of phenomena, creating subcategories and supercategories. It is called fractal because each distinction repeats a pattern within itself, as is the case with fractals in geometry" (Gal, 2016: 92). Lapachi (2021) has also explored liminalities of death and COVID-19 pandemic in Georgia albeit with a different focus.

[5] Our research focuses on labour migrants who have either documentation problems or unstable and precarious work. All this keeps migrants in a liminal condition, hindering their incorporation in the new society. We recognise the differences in migrant experiences of the Georgian diaspora in Russia as vividly portrayed in Scott's book (2016). There are significant Georgian diaspora groups all over Russia, which might have overcome the marginality.

[6] We look at the death rituals from the Actor-Network Theory perspective (Callon, 1986) considering the importance of non-human actants. Entanglement of the human and non-human aspects is a complex network (Hodder, 2012 or Meshwork for Ingold, 2007) that can be disrupted and rearranged. It is especially pronounced in the series of liminalities.

The article is based on interviews, ethnographic observations, digital ethnography of the Facebook pages of Georgian migrants in Russia, and an analysis of online media between June 2021 and September 2022. We interviewed twenty Georgian migrants residing in Russia who had experience in dealing with deaths related to migrants and migration prior to and during the pandemic. Some of the migrants are already returnees to Georgia. We were interested in situations where the deceased and his/her bereaved mourners were geographically apart, separated by state borders. It included cases where migrants died in Russia and were transferred to Georgia, and cases where migrants in Russia wanted to attend mortuary rituals for a deceased in Georgia. We conducted interviews with family members of deceased migrants who oversaw repatriation to Georgia, conversations with diplomats and with representatives of funeral services involved in posthumous transnational circulation of the body. Our observations also include participation in funeral rituals for deceased migrants. This part of the research was very restricted and conducted only in cases where death was not Covid-related. It was not possible for us to travel to Russia because of the pandemic initially and because of the war with Ukraine afterwards.[7] We limited our discussion only to Georgian Christian funeral rites and to Georgian Christian migrants residing in Russia.[8]

The Context: Georgian Migration to Russia before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In recent years, the Georgian diaspora became the smallest diaspora in Russia compared to other South Caucasian migrants.[9] Before the year 2000, the largest number of Georgian migrants would go to Russia (64.5% according to Salukvadze and Meladze, 2014: 155-156). By 2008, the emigration to Russia changed, as it decreased to 40.2% (Salukvadze and Meladze, 2014). It can be explained by the fact that in 2000 Russia imposed the visa regime on Georgia,[10] followed in 2006 by forceful, and in some cases, fatal deportations that saw a disregard of human rights.[11] The experience of deportation of hundreds of migrants became a turning point for the perception of Russia as a place of migration. Moreover, the war in August 2008 between Russia and Georgia and the suspension of flights, the closure of consulates, and sanctions against Georgian companies in the aftermath have virtually halted labour migration from Georgia (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2021). Those who stay in Russia as labour migrants often find themselves in precarious situations that push them to invisibility.[12] The Russian migratory regime is particularly inclined to make migrants less visible: Turaeva (2021) uses the term "propiska regime", applying a Foucauldian regime-based approach to show how the system of territorial/administrative registration ("propiska") forces migrants to immobility and clandestinity, but also leaves them without any provision from the State. It pushes them into the shadows of informality, employment without proper documents, or using fake or semi-legal documents (comp. Turaeva and Urinboyev, 2021). In such circumstances, the individual in question is considered "illegal" (Reeves, 2013). De Genova uses the term "deportability" which epitomises the lived risk experienced by migrants: "Undocumented migrations are constituted in order not to physically exclude them, but instead, to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability" (De Genova, 2002: 429). As Reeves writes "in the context of contemporary Moscow, it also arises from the inherent uncertainty over where that boundary between 'legal' and 'illegal' presence actually lies" (Reeves, 2013: 511). Reeves discusses migrant (il) legality as something inherent to the everyday life of the migrant in Russia. In conversations we had, migrants negotiate their (il)legality and deportability with informal arrangements in everyday life. Migrants share experiences of arrests and paying bribes to the police officers. When "oblava" [Russian word for raid] happens, they might end up in a police station but can buy themselves free with bribes. "If the arrested person does not pay, the case will be taken to court and he or she will be deported, but such cases are very rare."[13]

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[7] The research conducted by Ketevan Gurchiani among migrants in the US and interviews with elite migrants in the EU shows that it is still important to be buried in Georgia despite social status or country desirability. As contextual analysis of each case is important, we will only briefly mention some similarities with the Russian case in the current paper.

[8] Christian funerary practices do not necessarily imply wide involvement of the Church or that the deceased was a believer. The funerals described are the most common form of death-related rituals. As being orthodox is often a proxy for ethnicity for many Georgians, it is not surprising that church buildings in migration evolve as islands of "home". Muslim Georgians would bury their dead on the second day, while Christian rituals tend to be lengthier.

[9] "In 2011, it numbered 7,300 people, in 2018, it dropped to 6,900, that is, seven times less than the number of Armenians" (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2021).

[10] Грузия-Россия: когда откроются границы?, *Golosameriki*, [online] last checked on 12/01/2022. URL: https://www.golosameriki.com/a/nc-georgia-russia-visa-regime/3733674.html. For tensions starting from the 1990s between two countries see Gordadze (2009 and 2011), Salukvadze and Meladze (2014: 154-156).

Crisis-like situations reveal acute vulnerabilities of unauthorised migrants. This was the case in 2006 when the Russian state massively deported Georgian migrants. During that period, 4,634 expulsion orders were issued against Georgians, of which 2,380 were detained and forcibly deported, and the remaining 2,254 people left the country on their own. Three people died in custody. "It was shocking when we saw our countrymen, Georgians who did not have documents, being deported from Russia. We were particularly sorry for the children."[14] "I spent every day in prisons, searching for undocumented Georgians, who were put in "abeziankas" [monkey cages]. These were not criminals — just normal people with no proper documents. We managed to get them out from the prison, but they were all deported."[15]

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[11] CoE "strongly urges" Russia to pay €10 million compensation to Georgia over 2006 deportations by September, *Agenda.ge*, [online] last checked on 12/01/2022. URL: https://agenda.ge/en/news/2021/1577. In 2014, the dispute essentially ended with the victory of Georgia, and the procedures related to the compensation of the victims began. The Strasbourg court ordered Russia to pay 10 million euros to the citizens of Georgia. "The European Court of Human Rights held by sixteen votes to one that Russia has to pay Georgia 10,000,000 euros for non-pecuniary damage suffered by a group of at least 1,500 Georgian nationals," the court's press office says (see also Sterio, 2020).

[12] One of the causes of migrants' insecurity is their indebtedness and rent-paying problems. For more on this see Brednikova and Tkach (2010: 75), Tkach and Brednikova (2016).

[13] Interview with a migrant in Moscow, 5 January 2022. As De Genova notes: "In everyday life, undocumented migrants are invariably engaged in social relations with 'legal' migrants as well as citizens, and they commonly live in quite intimate proximity to various categories of 'documented' persons" (De Genova, 2002: 422).

The fear of forceful deportation still characterises everyday life of undocumented migrants, although it is not specific to Georgian migrants: the opacity of the Russian migratory regime shapes most migrants' life in the country.[16] "I have lived here for twenty years without any documents. It is constant stress and real torture".

The original here shows Georgian text written in Russian letters.[17] Written by a woman migrant, it is a linguistic portrayal of her liminality, being between two languages, two alphabets reflecting the uncertainties of her liminal existence.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of migrant workers, particularly affecting their social, psychological, medical, and economic well-being. Due to lockdowns, many migrants lost their jobs (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2020). Illegal migrants faced greater problems. They could not easily seek medical treatment; reportedly, undocumented migrants could not be tested for COVID-19 because they did not have health insurance (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2022: 48). Others refused to see a doctor themselves because they feared that their illegal status would come to light and they would be deported or, if infected, quarantined. The constraints linked to housings proved to be an even greater obstacle during the pandemic. It was impossible to isolate oneself or maintain social distance. Increasingly, migrant workers were viewed through the securitisation lens. They were often portrayed in the media as a danger to society and a source of viral contagion, which exacerbated their vulnerability (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2022: 48 and 50). They were unable to travel to or return from their home countries due to border closures. The right to travel remained only for migrants who wished to return home, but it would be hard to go back to Russia, especially because in both countries, the circulation of migrants, whether alive or deceased, was seen as a vector of contagion. Russia and Georgia closed borders on 13th March 2020, thus limiting travel between two countries.[18] As there are no flights between Russia and Georgia, the land route was the only viable option for most migrants. Under these circumstances, people with dual citizenship became crucial for mobility between Russia and Georgia, especially when travelling was inevitable. They could remain relatively mobile and became points of contact for non-mobile people.

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[14] Interview with a migrant woman from Saint Petersburg, Spring 2021.

[15] Interview with a Georgian diplomat in Russia, discussing the period when Georgian-Russian political relations were tense, Spring 2021.

[16] Russia offers opportunities but also generates anxieties for migrants due to changing migratory policies (Turaeva, 2013). In the contemporary Russian metropolis, the boundary between legal and illegal is blurred, and precariousness is normalised. In such normalised uncertainties, trust networks are very important for migrants in Russia to overcome vulnerability. Trust networks are difficult to build during migration, especially if it is a labour migration caused by economic problems in the home countries. Migrants need time and special circumstances to build homes and trust networks in migration countries.

[17] We found this text in the Facebook group in October 2021.

[18] Georgia, Russia temporarily ban travel due to coronavirus, *Agenda.ge*, [online] last checked on 29/10/2022. URL: https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/796

Where Two Liminalities Reinforce One Another: Funeral Rites in the Context of Migration

When death occurs during migration, repatriation to Georgia is favoured by migrants for two main reasons: first, the families usually want to give them a "proper" farewell in order to honour the deceased. Otherwise, they feel that the deceased may remain in limbo.

Secondly, families highly value the grave as a site of remembrance. Visiting the grave many years after the death is a strong tradition in Georgia, which is hampered by migration and distance. Months, if not years, after the burial, families visit the grave of the deceased, who is still understood as a combination of a body and a soul.

In the migratory context, the intertwining of migration and death reinforces the liminal status of migrants, which tends to produce interconnected and painful constraints. First, the liminality caused by migratory status entails difficulties for Georgian migrants to organise a proper wake and burial. In Georgian funerary rituals, the house constituted as a home is the central stage for collectively attending the deceased, mourning, and is considered a temporary (although crucial) resting place for the soul.[19] The body is considered the abode of the soul long after death, and for this reason, it should be brought to the house of the diseased, home. According to the common belief, the soul of the deceased remains within the house for forty days and then departs, a belief depicted by the euphemism for death "*gardacvaleba*" meaning: "transformation into the other world".

In Georgia, funerary rituals usually start with reversing the normality of the space: all household items are removed from the room to invert routine daily functions. The door, which is normally locked, is open and remains open until the funeral. The room becomes a scene where the coffin of the deceased is the focal point surrounded by women in mourning who sit and watch the corpse. A space is left between the coffin and the chief mourners, who are family members, so that incoming mourners can form a circle and offer their condolences. The usual division between day and night no longer exists. The bereaved do not sleep. Family members and relatives take it in turns to keep vigil around the coffin. Keeping the candles burning and straightening the flowers are the last acts that gradually make death a reality. The house turns to a stage of a liminal ritual (Gurchiani, 2021: 100-111). The materiality of the house should allow this transformation.

Yet, in the context of migration, the affordances of a house cannot be actualised given the many constraints migrants usually deal with. The houses occupied by migrants lack the qualities required to be venues for funeral rites. The dwelling spaces of migrants are often small, shared and temporary. Even after years of working, migrants still share dwelling spaces with other people, live in hostels, and hardly put down any roots. Changing jobs means moving house. As some scholars note, the places migrants live lack their personalities, as they must move on quickly (Brednikova and Tkach, 2010: 76).

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[19] As Cieraad (2021: 198) formulates, "concept of the house lacks the emotional connotation of home". For her, "home is not only about emotions or memories, but also about bonding with a place and a material environment, ranging in scale from a room, a dwelling, a street, a neighbourhood, a village or town, a region or a country".

Moreover, rules and procedures governing death in migration in Russia create a distance between the deceased and the mourners, which is devastating to Georgian migrants.

> "*When my brother-in-law died, we contacted a Moscow funeral agency, and they took care of the corpse. There was no way we could arrange grievance days at our rented apartment. You see, the owner of the apartment would not allow us to bring a corpse where we lived. The neighbors would complain. These are not our homes. So, to grieve properly, we organised the transfer to Georgia.*"

Mzia, a history teacher and the wife of a construction worker, who spent many years in Moscow, told us. "*Only those who have nobody in Georgia, have to stay there without a proper funeral*", she adds.

Georgian traditions may be perceived as out of place under a Russian gaze.[20] Placing the body in a residential building and mourning with kin and friends, seems bizarre and "the landlord will not let them do it".[21] The neighbours who would have been the crucial support in Georgia, become the hindrance: "*Neighbours will complain if we bring the corpse to the rented place to grieve. They never do this when somebody dies*", explains Mzia. In interviews, we saw how migrants miss their own four walls, the social cement to bind them and the social environment that connects the house to that of their neighbours.[22] It felt strange to her that the body was in a funeral house, and they were grieving just sitting in the apartment until funeral arrangements were completed and they were allowed to transfer the body back to Georgia. The physical absence of the body of the diseased from those who mourn her or him leaves the feeling that the "proper" respect is not paid.

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[20] From the Russian perspective, Georgia is seen as a traditional country. This view goes back to the Soviet period. The Georgian diaspora was criticised by Soviet authorities for overspending on weddings and wakes as "harmful traditions" (Scott, 2016: 120). In contrast, Georgians often see Russia as a place where traditions are getting lost. Eventually, Georgian migrants began to view their traditions through the (sometimes imagined) Russian gaze, i.e. adapting them according to what they thought was socially acceptable to do in Russia.

[21] Interview with a Georgian school teacher in Russia, summer 2021.

[22] Some authors think that while being away from homes, migrants lose the sense of home vis-à-vis their homeland and stay somewhere in-between their homeland and place of migration (see Chávez, 1992 and for recent discussion Boccagni *et al.*, 2021). Sometimes homes stop existing during migration. Home is neither here nor there. According to Bauman (2001), only elite groups can afford to create a new home. The temporary rooms migrants often occupy do not feel like home (Brednikova and Tkach, 2010: 76).

The migrants we met also mentioned the fact that they never witnessed in Russia death rituals similar to Georgian rites.[23] In Georgia, a three-day period of mourning and farewell is usually held at home, in close interaction with the neighbours.[24] In contrast, the absence of death in everyday lives seemed to be a striking difference between two countries for many migrants. Sahadeo quotes, for example, a Georgian woman who said that after she had migrated to Russia, death became invisible for her (she recollects the 1980s): "*Well, I thought, how many months I have lived here, and no one was dying. No one was wearing black… I didn't see any funerals or burials*". A Russian woman explained to her: "*People die in Moscow every day, but they are just taken to the mortuary*" (Sahadeo, 2019: 87). This quote refers to both, the invisibility of the funerals and the invisibility of the social grief, which is in contrast with Georgian performativity of death rituals. What is considered the norm from a Russian perspective shocks Georgian migrants. Another difference the migrants speak of is the short time between death and burial. According to Eliso, a Georgian woman teaching biology in a Georgian school in Saint Petersburg, "Russians are burying their dead on the second day after death". She could not understand this tradition as in her hometown, they would mourn for several days to show their love and respect before the burial takes place. In the meantime, she would suspend her activity, interrupt her daily life. When somebody dies back in Georgia and migrants cannot travel, they still try to be involved economically and emotionally. She, as well as other migrants we met, talk about the bewilderment they felt when they could not travel to their home country when somebody close to them died, and they had to continue working knowing their dead friend or a family member was still not buried back in Georgia. Not only are the wake and burials different, but also the mourning processes. The liminality of death rituals here intersects with an even greater liminality: the in-betweenness caused by migratory status. Thus, death in migration and the differences in funeral rites exacerbate the feelings of otherness and not belonging.

What has been described should show how migrants see their own traditions through the eyes of others and perceive them as out of place. Some practices are particularly vulnerable to this foreign gaze. In Western Georgia, there is a particularly interesting albeit disappearing tradition, namely bringing home the soul of a dead person using a white thread. One end of the thread is fastened to the place where the person dies, and the other end is then attached to the final destination in the house of the deceased. The thread is tied and unfolded so that it reaches the house, the home of the deceased.

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[23] Similar traditions are described in the literature. See Warner (2000: 259) and Rouhier-Willoughby (2007). Our Russian colleagues from Moscow and Saint Petersburg shared similar observations during our conversations: "It is not usual for a body to be kept at home for mourning now in the urban environment. In rural areas the bodies are usually kept at home for mourning purposes. In urban centres, they are transported to the mortuaries. All the 'panikhidi' are held in the churches usually" or in mortuaries, according to other Russian friends and Georgian migrants in Russia. Conversation with a Russian anthropologist, autumn of 2021.

[24] In Georgia, which is a predominantly Orthodox Christian country, death-related rituals have a basic structure, which is widely shared. It is a classic transition ritual. Its main purpose is to facilitate the transition for both the deceased and their family members.

> “*Ten years ago, I saw a woman carrying a thread in the plane, from Russia to Georgia. In Russia, she fastened the thread from home to the entrance, and all the way to the plane. On arrival, her relatives helped her to fasten threads from the airport to the home.*”

Others recorded how the thread was tied to a car and brought all the way to Western Georgia.

Eventually, migration made this ritual vulnerable not least because of bundling (Keane, 2005 and 2014). A white thread can be a medium for the soul. But the physical composition of a thread becomes a constraint that limits human actions. Threads tend to break or fray easily. The migration issue amplifies this constraint by adding the distance element. Migrants were aware of side-glances. “*We had to constantly justify ourselves and they looked at us like we were crazy. Now only in remote villages is this done*”, says Dali. The ritual needed explanation and rationalisation in Russia, whereas it was completely natural in their own village. The pandemic has proved to be an additional liminality restricting materiality. Constraints have taken over and the practice of transporting the soul via a thread seems to have waned in recent years.

Migrants’ feeling of funerary “extraneity” under the Russian gaze epitomises the fact that most labour migrants’ houses or places of residence in Russia hardly become their homes, even when they are settled as families. It is sometimes true even for migrants with stable living conditions in Russia. Laura has lived in Russia for more than thirteen years. Her father, who had a business firm, brought her there. Later, she got married and her children were born in Russia. She said: “*Every time I go back to Georgia, I feel I am at home, it feels as if I am born again*”. Conversations with migrants reveal that they often keep their savings to build a house in Georgia. It is the same understanding of temporality of their migration that keeps them repatriating bodies. A Georgian migrant in Russia told us, “*I am here for some time, the grave should be taken care of forever, so we repatriated our uncle*”. The construction of a house in the home country, as well as the establishment of a gravesite for the deceased in the home country, both point to the migrants’ perceived liminality and how they envision the end of this temporary out-of-placeness.[25] The house in Georgia is envisaged as opposed to the house experienced in Russia, which is full of constraints such as the lack of space, the lack of emotional attachment, all of which are particularly vivid in the context of the experience of someone’s death.

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[25] Interview with Lela, former migrant in Russia, 2020.

Coping with Distance: the Church and Ad-Hoc Networks

Sometimes, there is a need to substitute both the home and the mourner, at least temporarily.[26] When there are no family or friends, the information about the death of a labour migrant may be broadcast via social media to notify people who then find networks that could take care of funeral arrangements. When there is no home for the dead body, and death happens in a place, where there is a Georgian Church, the building of the church plays the role of a home (Ryazantsev *et al.*, 2021) where funerals can take place. The former vice-consul from Georgia in Saint Petersburg, told us that the construction of a Georgian church was the primary wish of migrants.

> "*It was 1992 when a new wave of refugees fleeing the war in Abkhazia came to Russia. They wanted to have a Georgian church not only for religious rituals but as a place to maintain their identity, ease nostalgia and keep the faith of returning home.*"

They negotiated with the mayor of that time and renovated an old Orthodox church. Some Georgian migrants were physically involved in the renovation, which connected them even more emotionally to the place. During our research, we talked with people who described the Georgian church in Saint Petersburg as a "little Georgia" saying that when they enter the church, they feel at home. They even talked about special bonds they have with the priest, who is also a refugee from Abkhazia and shares similar stories and pains with his parish.[27] Gogitidze (2011), who did research among the Georgian migrants in Saint Petersburg, quotes migrants describing the Church in the following way: "The Georgian Church is a bridge connecting us with Georgia" or "The Georgian Church is our spiritual food, when we are in trouble, we are here, when we are happy, we are here, we see each other, and we get stronger" (Gogitidze, 2011: 54). We also talked with Georgian migrants in Moscow about the role of the Georgian church. Nina lives forty-five kilometres away from Moscow, she has a very tough routine but always tries to be present at Sunday prayers at the Georgian church.

> "*It is a place where we meet Georgians and speak Georgian. For me the church is a place where I forget my troubles and feel a connection to home — Georgia.*"[28]

The funeral service at church often imitates the service at home and helps the mourners to transition from liminality to normality. They live with the feeling of a proper or almost proper funeral. Church thus plays a part of mitigating the feeling of liminality and otherness for some migrants. For others, who were not well connected, the Church was not an important actor and had no role in the funeral arrangements. Apparently, connections were crucial in where and if a funeral would be held, who would take care of the deceased and how many networks among migrants were actualised. However, in the mind of most migrants, the Church cannot replace hometown networks.

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[26] Sometimes, diplomats stand in for the family prior to transferring the deceased to Georgia. As a diplomat told us: "*When somebody died here, in Saint Petersburg, after official procedures that would take place in the mortuary, we would take the deceased to the church. Our priest would keep them there for three-four days and organise the funeral. In church, the priest would care for the soul of the deceased*". The labour migrants think it is rather an exception as they mostly remain invisible for diplomats and for the Church. Moreover, there are not so many Georgian churches in Russia and the experiences of spiritual care are limited to the two Churches existing in Moscow and in Saint Petersburg.

[27] Interview with the representative of the Georgian parish in Saint Petersburg, July 2022.

[28] Interview with the Georgian migrants in Russia, July 2022.

In Georgia, ties of mutual obligations that have been established over many years and passed from one generation to the next, sustain the networks that are actualised when death occurs in migration. Most people consider that ad-hoc networks (in a migratory context) cannot compensate for the home-based networks, which are the result of decades of reciprocity that can hardly be replaced. "*My father even held a diary. He wrote down, who came for different funerals that happened in the family over the years, how many times they would come, from where and if they contributed something*", says Rusudan, a Georgian woman from Zugdidi. In turn, she had to go to funerals to all those who came to pay their respects over the years. Neighbours will take over cooking and household chores during the days prior and during the funeral. "C*an you imagine how lonely you are because you don't know your neighbours in Moscow? Who would come to you and do it all if you died there?*" wondered an elderly woman.[29] Death in migration activates local networks back home. It is still considered the norm that families, larger kin, friends and neighbours collect money in Georgia and take care of transfer from Russia and burial at home. Raising money to aid the bereaved family is an integral part of burial in Georgia. Somebody, who has organisational skills and is a trustworthy person collects the money. She or he records the amounts donated in a notebook, which will be handed over to the family after the funeral. Ideally, the obligation to help with death rituals passes from generation to generation. This reciprocity is materialised in notebooks with names listed along with details of the amounts donated. We saw one notebook dating back to 1968 in Georgia (see Picture 1) and another notebook from 1983 with a list of 131 contributors (see Picture 2) as a symbol of networks and obligations. The family keeps it, and when someone else dies, they often look at it and try to give as much as they themselves received. These notebooks are passed down from generation to generation and may transcend borders and follow migrants when they (or somebody from their network) die. It is mostly up to the localised networks to organise the repatriation of the deceased relative or friend abroad.

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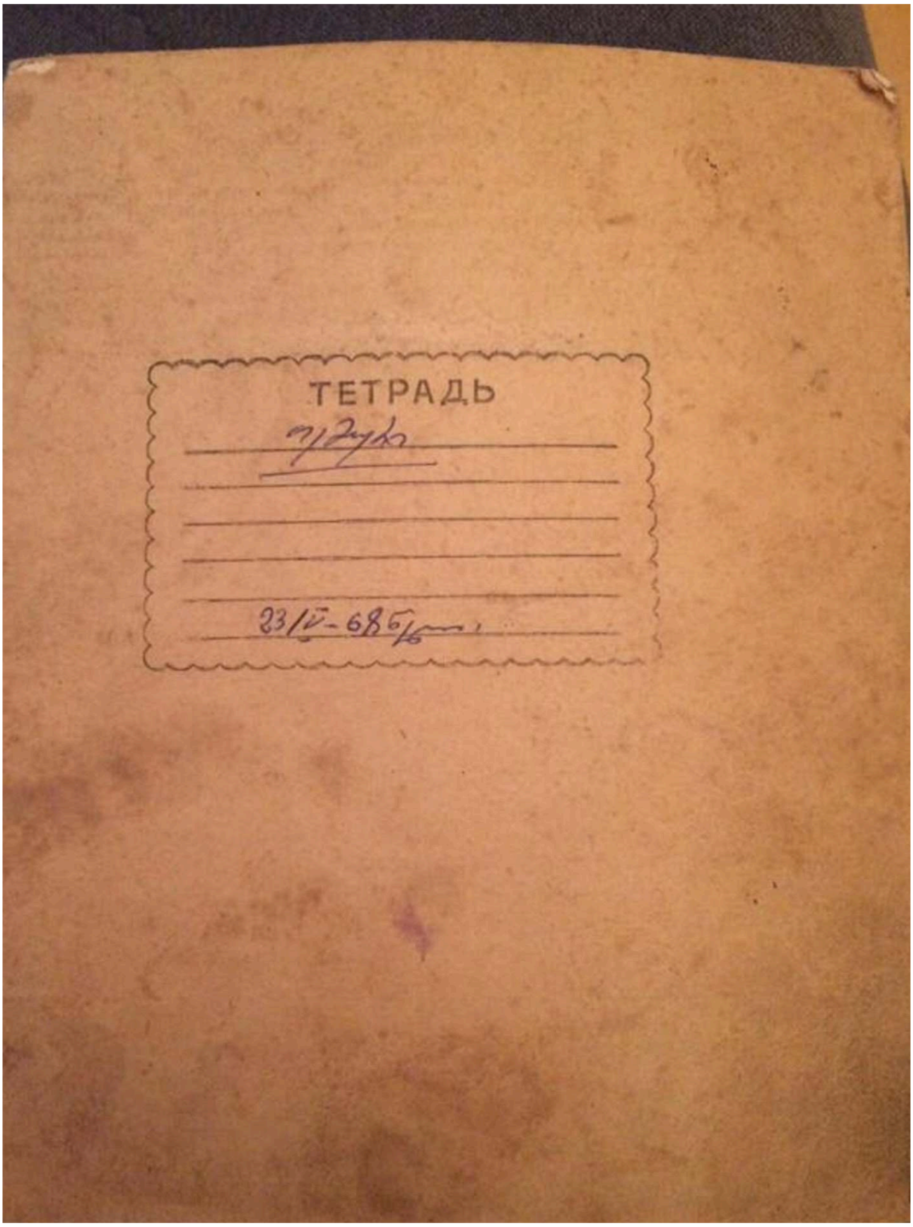
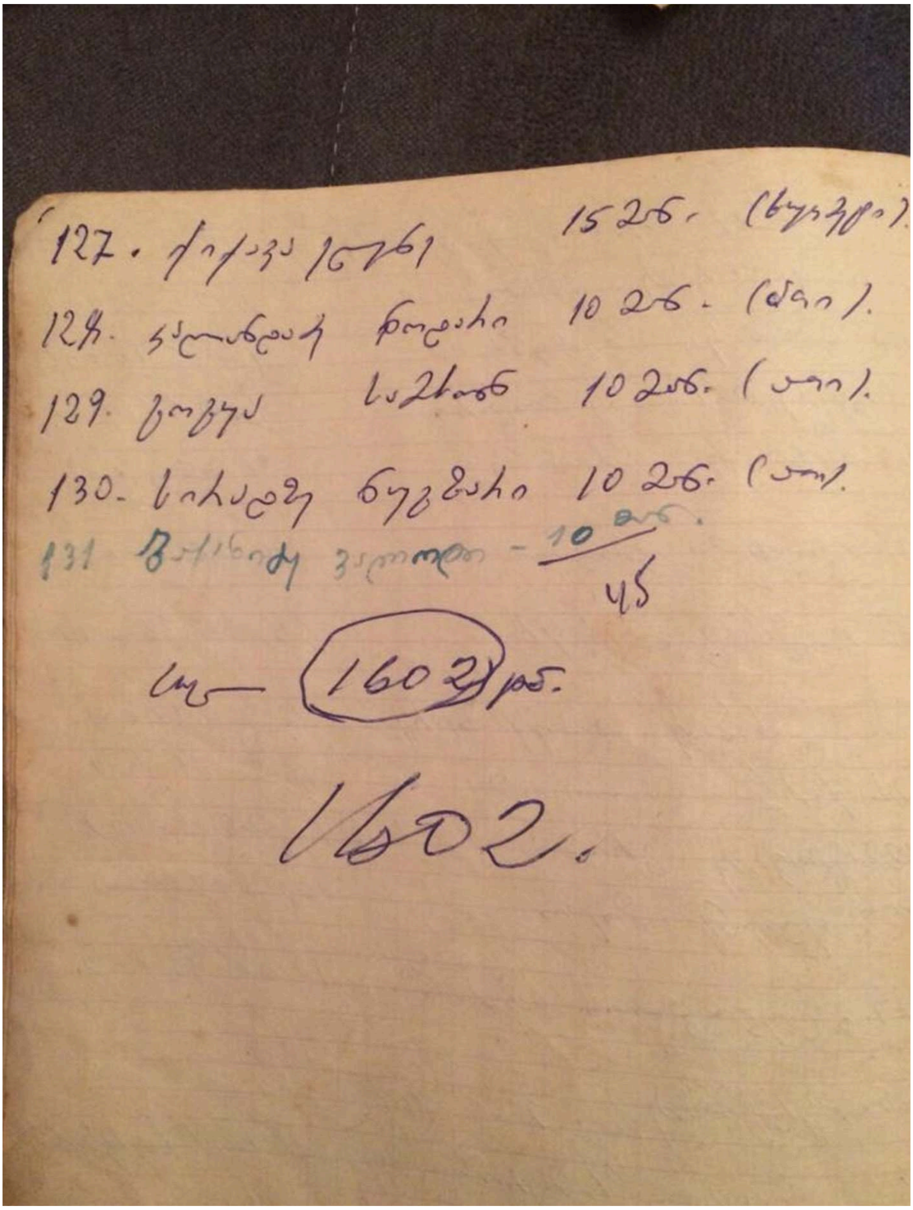
[29] Maybe many similar Orthodox mortuary funeral practices exist in a more tacit form in Russia too. Due to lack of networks with local communities, most labour migrants do not have the experience of similar practices organised by Russians. As Georgian labour migrants live in great isolation, they have no experience of solidarity between neighbours either.

Picture 1: A notebook from 1968



Legend: A notebook for funeral money donations from 23/05/1968.
Credit: S. Liparteliani, 2018, a village in Adjara, Georgia.

Picture 2: A list of money donations from 1983



127. [illegible] 15 მნ. ([illegible])
128. [illegible] 10 მნ. ([illegible])
129. [illegible] 10 მნ. ([illegible])
130. [illegible] 10 მნ. ([illegible])
131 [illegible] – 10 მნ.
45

სულ — 1602 მნ.

1602.

Legend: A notebook from 1983 with a list of 131 people who came for the funeral and gave money for expenses (seen in 2018 in Georgia).
Credit: S. Liparteliani, 2018, a village in Adjara, Georgia.

There are cases when the network at home is replaced with ad-hoc networks in Russia. People with similar death rituals may cooperate.[30] Shared understandings and practices help new networks emerge. Interviews revealed evidence of a Caucasian solidarity, be it Azerbaijani-Georgian[31] or Armenian-Georgian. The practices that emerge out of this cooperation are another topic of study. However, such networks usually seem to be much newer and fewer in number — and rather occasional. They also collect money to help with funeral costs, but they are perceived as a solution of last recourse, of acute need. As Mzia told us in the case of her brother-in-law, "*Some money has been collected in Moscow too. They came to our apartment, and we organised a wake. But with this money, we would not be able to transfer the corpse to Georgia. It would just cover the wake*".

Migrants often see it as disrespectful if the family and networks in Georgia do not take care of deceased migrants and the migrants must collect money. Mzia told us a story of a cook, who had no family in Georgia so the money for transfer was not collected in Georgia. What they could collect in Moscow was enough for basic arrangements. The migrant ended up in the cemetery for the homeless. The word she uses in Georgian is "upatrono," literally meaning somebody without a patron, i.e., without close kin. The moral responsibility to collect money and organise funerals lies with the local community. If migrants have to collect money and send the body or organise a burial in Russia, it needs an explanation, it becomes something "storyable" and tellable (Sacks, 1984). This defies the norm and casts doubt on the quality of the funeral for the deceased concerned.

When the Deceased Cross the National Borders

Death in migration, during the pandemic, is a form of crisis that shows the porousness of material and immaterial. The transfer of dead bodies reveals the complex entanglement of matter with ideas and emotions. On their path through a chain of liminalities, the material properties can become a constraint. During the pandemic, anything material was considered dangerous for the spread of the virus. This included the deceased's body, as well as the belongings of the deceased and the living bodies of grieving family members who wanted to travel.

For the national states, the transfer of a body consists of a bureaucratic procedure that follows a protocol. The protocol in Russia became stricter during the pandemic, as in many other parts of the world. When a migrant woman died of COVID-19 in Summer 2021, Bella recalls how anonymous and devoid of all emotion the beginning of the process was:

> "*From the Russian part, it all happened very formally. She died in a clinic. She was very religious and maybe would have loved to have a priest but there was nobody to take care of it.*"

There was nobody to lovingly close her eyes or to take care of the body in a dignified manner (the term used is "gapatiosneba" — to honour the body). The constraints of the body — its vulnerability and potential dangerousness — are especially actualised when it has to travel across the border. Even before the pandemic, the state treated such bodies as a dangerous matter. In official procedures, the dead body is quickly transformed into a corpse. David remembered how he could not get permission from authorities to say goodbye to his friend, to take him home for a short period so everybody could bid farewell. "*The body bag was sealed, and no-one was allowed to open it*".

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[30] According to Oparin, death rituals help migrants build or strengthen networks (2020: 368).

[31] Despite religious differences: the majority of Azerbaijani people are Muslim.

According to the rule, the local funeral home in Russia places the body in a coffin and attaches the documentation. On the Georgian side, a representative from the Georgian funeral home or the family waits at the border (at the airport) to receive the coffin and transport it to the mourners.[32] Corpses undergo special preparation to pass border inspection. The coffin must be sealed to prevent drug transportation across the border as a former diplomat to Russia explained to us. Securitisation turns the body into a sealed cargo. Special airport services handle it in both countries."[33] People still use the name "cargo 200" ("tvirti 200" in Georgian or "Gruz 200" in Russian), which is a military medical term (more about this term, please see the introduction to this volume). During these processes, the body is reduced to a material object to a certain extent. The material aspect overrides the emotional aspect.[34] For the securitised view, the body can be used for illegal activities such as trafficking drugs. During the pandemic, the body additionally represented a hazard. It was potentially contaminated and contaminating. For mourners the body is foremost the person they knew.

The transportation of dead bodies became a lengthier process during the pandemic as both countries restricted travel to citizens. The commercial funeral service had to have a clearance to cross the border. It was one of the solutions, but it was costly. Transportation by car has been a preferred choice for labour migrants because this is the cheapest solution. In most cases, no intermediary firm is contracted. Family or friends drove a car or hired an experienced driver who was allowed to enter countries. Having a dual citizenship became very handy as only citizens of both countries were allowed to enter the respective countries. Bella, whose mother-in-law died in a Russian provincial town during the pandemic, told us it was difficult to find somebody who could help with funeral rituals in Nizhny Novgorod (a town located 400 km east of Moscow).

> "*My mother-in-law had business there and seemed to be well connected but somehow when she died, everything was organised from here. First, we tried to obtain permission from the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the borders were closed. It would take weeks. Then we found somebody in Russia, a Georgian friend of the family. He had dual citizenship and agreed to bring the corpse of the deceased with his car.*"

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[32] Interview with a funeral home representative, January 5, 2022.

[33] Government decree n°153, 2013, July 20, formally governs regulations regarding the transfer of the deceased from abroad to Georgia, [online]. URL: https://mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/MainNav/DiplomatService/Legislation/matsne1951741.pdf.aspx. This regulation was specified during the pandemic, [online]. URL: https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/596308-sagareo-sakmeta-ministris-moadgile-sazgvargaret-gardacvlili-mokalakeebis-samshobloshi-gadmosvenebis-procedurebs-ganmartavs/

[34] Here we see a clash between semiotic ideologies (Keane, 2007 and 2014: 314).

She goes on to explain the ties and mutual obligations that would bring this Georgian man to take the body of somebody who died of COVID-19 and drive it to Georgia. His dual citizenship enabled him to move freely between two countries amid travel restrictions. The costs of travel were covered by the money that the family and friends collected in Georgia.

It takes three to four days to drive from Moscow to Georgia, and many problems can arise during the journey. One driver told us that he was hired to transport the dead body of a man who had documentation problems, which took time to sort out. "*I spent nine days with the dead body on my way back to Georgia*". On the land border between Russia and Georgia, in the town of Lars, the queues at the border became especially long during the COVID-19 pandemic. One needed connections and empathy from the border guards on both sides not to wait too long.

From "Cargo 200" to the Personification of the Dead Body: Reappropriating the Deceased's Body

The official procedure transforms the deceased into a securitised body. The process of repatriation is a process of reversal in which the mourners turn the non-human Cargo 200 into a human again. The Latourian "translation" process begins once the deceased's body has been transferred. The process of reversal aims at dignifying and honouring the dead. It involves "proper" lament, "proper" materiality, starting with coffins. Right after the cars cross the land border, the mourners on the Georgian side may replace the temporary coffin with a more dignified one. As David told us, recalling his experience of driving to the Georgia-Russia border in the Caucasus, one could clearly see discarded coffins.

David, who helped his friend transport his late uncle back from Russia, says:

> "*We looked outside and could see a wooden coffin in the forest. You know what happens: When somebody dies in Russia and there is nobody to take care of the deceased, the corpse is placed in a temporary coffin. It is basically four pieces of plywood. The car that takes the deceased over on the Georgian side brings a new coffin. They just throw away the plywood coffin in the forest. It is such a strange sight, all these coffins in the forest.*"

The change of coffin is another attempt to honour the dead and to reintegrate the dead into anchored local practices.

The change of coffins happens in consideration of the mourning families too. Family members try not to witness the dead body as a freight following transportation as this is perceived as heart-breaking.

> "*I was fifteen years old when my uncle was brought back, sealed in a zinc coffin. This is a very tragic story for my family. We had not seen my uncle in a long while, and after all this time, he came back in a sealed, zinc coffin. We subsequently put him in a normal coffin and arranged a home funeral. We invited the priest to bring him spirituality home.*"

Such transforming and translating practices are common. With these rituals, mourners endeavour to translate "Cargo 200" into a loved one. The process of separation of the person from their (non-living) body, central to the securitised perspective, is reversed. It becomes a hybrid in the process of Latourian translation — it is a dead body but still a person (Latour, 1993).

The translation happens linguistically too. For those waiting for the dead to arrive at the land border or at the airport, the dead bodies become "*micvalebuli*" (transformed), i.e. an individual who is in the process of transitioning to another being. The contrast between protocol practices (entailed by Russian regulations and performed by funeral homes) and the reverence demonstrated (by mourners) is also manifested in the choice of words. Both language and rituals seek to distance themselves from objectification. Finding the right words, ensuring a dignified process, and transforming official protocols into rituals shows a continuous attempt to "euphemising" death. There are numerous terms to refer to death in the Georgian language. Rituals and terminology relating to death come together in "krdzalva" (restrictions) and "da-krdzalva" (burial), and both share a common root. Both mean "reverence" and "restrictions/taboo". Linguistically, reverence is always expressed towards death.[35]

We see how in the long channel of liminalities, some practices prevail while others are discarded. Here, we see that despite many restrictions, the transfer of bodies and organisation of funerals at home remained stable. The families of migrants went to great lengths even to exhume bodies and bring them back to Georgia when the pandemic restrictions eased. "*I constantly saw him wandering in my dreams, as if he wanted to return home*", recalls a woman whose dreams about her deceased brother kept her in a state of anxiety until the repatriation took place. He died in the height of the pandemic and was buried "*somewhere, without anybody he knew next to him*". The dreams that are seen as a communication medium with the dead, dictated to her the proper way to handle the death of her brother far from home.

We mentioned the fact that the house as a home is important as the site of funeral rituals and the place where body and soul return from the place where death occurred, but the cemetery and grave are equally important. Graves are places where social ties are assured and memories are rekindled — although it constitutes a vast topic that is only addressed briefly in this paper (see also Söderlind, 2017: 66). While it would have been very unusual not to attend the funeral of family members, we saw how during pandemics "virtual rituals" emerged. Instead of the requirement for physical travel to attend a funeral, creative solutions have emerged that allow mourners for "digital"/virtual participation.

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[35] For Georgian philologist Jorbenadze (1997: 53-54) the reverence towards death defines the fact that the deceased is restricted to be recalled without reverence. Words referring to death as "mitsvaleba" (Georgian word for passing-away, literally-changeability), "mitsvalebuli" (Georgian word for passed-away, literally, changed in form), raised the interest of Georgian writer and public figure Ilia Chvachavadze. For him, these terms reflect "the belief of a Georgian in the act of nature called death", meaning that death "is not passing in nothingness/nonexistence, but changing form" (1997: 53).

Pandemic and Technologies of Mourning

This section looks at how technologies become actant in the complex entanglement of the human and non-human aspects, and how technologies have tended to mitigate the liminal status of migrants. During the pandemic, technologies became key actants in remote mourning. Before the pandemic, "virtual rituals" would be very rare and less accepted.

The pandemic has threatened the collective nature of funeral and mourning rituals (restricting the number of people allowed to attend funerals) and has contributed to the lengthening of transnational procedures, through restrictions on border crossings.[36] Mobile people were associated with the spread of the virus and the reason for mobility was of secondary importance.[37] This is why migrants were often unable to travel and participate in the grieving process and death rites. Therefore, mourners turned to technology to virtually be at home, in the place of mourning. This digital alternative has been observed all over the world.[38] Technology allowed people to join in the grieving process despite distance. Indeed, the "sharing" of grief despite geographical distance became widespread:

> "*In Summer of 2020, one of my relatives died. We all were afraid of the virus, but we had to go to the funeral. It was the time when flights were restricted, and the children of the deceased were unable to return home. They were in Saint Petersburg. I was shocked by the fact that, before taking the coffin to the cemetery, the dead man's daughter called her relative via WhatsApp, and our relative turned her phone towards the coffin. We all saw this girl calling from her car and crying so loudly. It made us all cry. I would never have imagined anything like that before, a daughter grieving the passing of her father via WhatsApp. I will never forget that day.*"

Paradoxically, the pandemic has normalised, to a certain extent, the use of technologies in rituals and the collective experience of mourning despite their geographical separation. In this sense, mobile technology has empowered migrants to be in touch with their families and to be engaged socially or economically (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2019; Ismailbekova and Baialieva, 2022), including in death. Technologies "make life more bearable, in moments of crisis, in the absence of better alternatives" for those undocumented migrants who could not make compromises to come home on the death of their loved ones (Bravo, 2016: 10).

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[36] In accordance with a decree passed by the Georgian government, individuals returning from Russia had to quarantine. Decree of Georgian Government 2020, 23rd May, Nr. 322.

[37] Prior to the pandemic, mourners were treated with particular respect and understanding. They would become prioritised bodies. However, such empathy mostly disappeared during the pandemic when state regulations restricting travel were forcefully implemented. During our research prior to the pandemic, we witnessed cases when Abkhazian border guards in a conflict region in Georgia, turned a blind eye towards people crossing the border for funerals. We also saw that police showed empathy towards people breaking traffic and parking rules, for example, when on their way to collect the deceased from the airport. The pandemic mostly quelled this empathy. Mourners, if they choose to travel to attend a funeral, were forced to go into quarantine and wider Georgian society suspected migrants and mobile people of spreading the virus. Indeed, during the pandemic, the two largest clusters in Georgia were associated with migrants and death rituals.

[38] The emergence of technologies in funerary rites is a new trend, poignantly referred to as "digital resilience" Enari and William Rangiwai (2021). See also Alexis-Martin (2020); Bear *et al.* (2020); Burrell and Selman (2020).

But besides this empowering character, engaging in technologies in mourning rituals can alter the experience of death rituals. Above-mentioned citation already shows our informant's attitude. As the tradition is deviated, she says "*I would never have imagined anything like that before*". Another interlocutor also shared her discomfort with engaging in technologies in death-related rituals.

> "*When my grandmother died, my mother could not return from Russia, she had problems with her documentation and if she crossed the border, she would not have managed to go back again. Economically, the whole family was dependent on my mother's work in Russia. Even though I wholly understood the context, it was very embarrassing for me to hear my mother mourning her own mother via computer. She is from Western Georgia, where they cry out loud, in other words their mourning traditions are very performative. Hearing all these via computer was so awkward and unusual that I had to leave the room.*"

Such examples show that technologies do not always replace physical attendance in mourning rituals smoothly. The normalisation of the use of technology can be lived as a "trivialisation" of mourning rituals, and thus can be experienced painfully.

From what we have seen, technology does not change the funeral ritual setting: it fits into the existing scheme of things with virtual presence replacing a physical one. When virtually joining the mourners from abroad, the migrant mourners take their allotted place in the room with a digital device switched on. In the summer of 2021, we were told the story of a woman who attended her husband's funeral via Skype. Everyone passed on their condolences via the computer monitor, which was placed on one of the chairs for the mourners. The material house remains the main stage of the wake but having a wake and receiving condolences can now be done from afar. In another case documented in the summer of 2021, the entire family of the deceased was absent and unable to travel, but they were virtually present throughout the process. Relatives and neighbours organised the funeral and replaced family members in person, while the family per se took part via social media/live online streaming from abroad. Even if the whole family had migrated, the capital (social, material, cultural, symbolic) acquired in previous years was activated when their relative died.

The increased use of technology is a general trend. Everyday strong religious beliefs turn out to be very open and creative in this regard.[39] As our examples show, technology is used to preserve the most important parts of the rituals, among which co-mourning and contributing financially and emotionally are central. Technologies enable migrants to keep or reactivate their social ties through their participation in — if not organisation of — rituals: sharing and displaying emotions with their relatives and neighbours at home contribute to reintegrating them into localised networks, some of them that could have been quite lost for some time.[40] When men cannot travel from a different country, they still organise an event in the country of migration.

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[39] Technology turned out to be a problematic solution in rituals involving transubstantiation (e.g. Holy Communion); the technological outpouring of grief became widespread and easy. For liturgy and theological debates, see Parish (2020).

> *"If they can't come, they will meet with their friends where they are. Friends may not have known the deceased at all, but a wake should be organised. Then they will call home or send pictures from the wake to say that they also took part."*

The wake organised in the migration country helps come to terms with death, strengthens ties among migrants and, as something performed for the home community, reaffirms ties in the home country.

Conclusion

Our analysis has shown how death exposes material and emotional constraints in migration, but also how death can mitigate some of the lived liminalities. When death occurs, migrants go through different layers of liminalities. The analysis showed how re-culturation practices enable the transition from uncertainty to normality, how the fragile localised networks at home are revitalised and commitments to reciprocity are revived. To analyse how migrants reclaim reciprocal ties, we approached migration and death during the pandemic as a channel of nested liminalities.

The context of nested liminalities when the liminality of death and the liminality of migration were shrouded in even greater liminality of the pandemic created a channel that allowed the most stable elements of funeral rites to come through via a process of "distillation". Some parts became more replaceable than others. The expressive co-grieving remained the stable part albeit in a creative form using online technologies when travel was not permitted. The practices were adapted, and creative responses emerged for transportation of grief using technologies. The technologies allowed migrants to maintain the grieving tradition and were empowering for those who could not afford to become visible. Most importantly, they made it possible to revitalise and reaffirm localised networks.

By extending existing research on death in migration (De Witte, 2011; Lee, 2011), we took a close look at reappropriation and "translation" practices during death in migration. By focusing on corpses as bundles of affects and "things" (Keane, 2005 and 2014), we analysed what materialities can do in this process. The text showed how anticultural prescriptions be it for biomedical (Engelke, 2019; Lipton, 2017) or securitisation reasons are overcome via culturally sensitive practices of "translation": the "cargo 200" is translated into the loved one, the coffins are replaced, the proximity with the dead is re-established. The process of reversal is a process of translation and transformation and has its material, linguistic and symbolic aspects. In this regard, it mitigates the lived liminality of migration.

Death offers an opportunity to reactivate the networks. It also offers migrants an opportunity to de-marginalise themselves. By going through the channel of liminalities, migrants come to terms with the death. But they accomplish something more beyond the primary function of the funerary rituals: they reaffirm their connections and make them more durable, thus overcoming challenges of migration that threaten reciprocal networks in local communities. Funerary practices and moral obligations associated with them solidify networks anchored in localised home communities. Through repatriated bodies and through participation in the funerals, migrants reclaim their bonds and the idea of the home back.

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[40] For gender roles in funeral rites, see Gurchiani, 2021: 111.

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Ketevan Gurchiani and Mariam Darchiashvili

“Nested Liminalities”: Death, Migration and Pandemic among Georgians in Russia

Based on an ethnographic fieldwork among Georgian migrants in Russia, the paper focuses on the management of deceased bodies abroad during the pandemic of COVID-19. More precisely, the paper identifies three levels of liminality, which contribute to the “making of death” in this context: that of death, that of migration, and that of the pandemic. The paper looks at the material and emotional expectations and constraints that surround the repatriation of corpses, including the technological solutions, and what these rituals do for the migrants. We see that during repatriation the bodies go through the process of material, linguistic and affective re-appropriation, which enables mourners to transition out of liminality. The paper also shows how death reactivates reciprocal networks and obligations in the homeland that might be disrupted by migration. Death rituals and their technological adaptations enable both the mitigation of some of the liminalities and the revitalisation of local networks.

« Liminalités imbriquées » : mort, migration et pandémie chez les Géorgiens en Russie

Basé sur un travail de terrain ethnographique parmi les migrants géorgiens en Russie, l’article se concentre sur la gestion des corps des défunts à l’étranger pendant la pandémie du COVID-19. Plus précisément, l’article identifie trois niveaux de liminalité, qui contribuent à la « fabrication de la mort » dans ce contexte : celui de la mort, celui de la migration et celui de la pandémie. L’article examine les attentes et les contraintes matérielles et émotionnelles qui entourent le rapatriement des corps, y compris les solutions technologiques, et ce que ces rituels apportent aux migrants. Nous voyons que lors du rapatriement, les corps passent par un processus de réappropriation matérielle, linguistique et affective, qui permet aux endeuillés de sortir de la liminalité. L’article montre également comment la mort réactive les réseaux et obligations réciproques dans le pays d’origine, qui pourraient être perturbés par la migration. Les rituels mortuaires et leurs adaptations technologiques permettent à la fois d’atténuer certaines des liminalités et de revitaliser les réseaux locaux.

«Liminalidades anidadas»: muerte, migración y pandemias entre los georgianos en Rusia

Basado en un trabajo de campo etnográfico entre emigrantes georgianos en Rusia, el artículo se centra en la gestión de los cuerpos de los fallecidos en el extranjero durante la pandemia de COVID-19. En concreto, el artículo identifica tres niveles de liminalidad que contribuyen a la «fabricación de la muerte» en este contexto: el de la muerte, el de la migración y el de la pandemia. El documento examina las expectativas y limitaciones materiales y emocionales que rodean la repatriación de los cuerpos, incluidas las soluciones tecnológicas, y lo que estos rituales aportan a los migrantes. Vemos que durante la repatriación, los cuerpos pasan por un proceso de reapropiación: material, lingüística y emocional, que permite a los afligidos salir de la liminalidad. El artículo también muestra cómo la muerte reactiva las redes y obligaciones recíprocas en el país de origen, que podrían verse interrumpidas por la migración. Los rituales de la muerte y sus adaptaciones tecnológicas mitigan algunas de las liminalidades y revitalizan las redes locales.