Peripheral Affects

Shame, Publics, and Performance on the Margins of the Republic of Georgia

Tamta Khalvashi

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Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen
Department of Anthropology
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To my grandfather,

Pridon Khalvashi
Acknowledgements

In any PhD thesis there are always a lot of people who have contributed to the work directly or indirectly by sharing their intellectual curiosity, friendship or just the patience to listen over the years. Mentioning them individually is impossible here, but nonetheless I acknowledge them all. Yet this thesis would not have been possible without a number of people who gave me the impetus and power to write on Georgia.

First of all I am particularly indebted to people in Ajara who generously shared their lives and opinions with me throughout my fieldwork in 2012-2013. As a native Ajaran, I felt benevolently embraced by my informants, although often we came to entertain very different points of view on such slippery subjects in Georgia as the nation, modernity, Islam, Christianity, and socialism – the general topics of my research interests in Ajara. At times it was these differences that frustrated me the most, but they also triggered my critical engagement with the place that was so intimately bound up with my own biography. I therefore deliberately protect the privacies of my informants, whose views and social lives are not always legal or compatible with current political imaginaries or the national visions at issue.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to my deceased grandfather, Pridon Khalvashi, with whom I grew up in Ajara until I was eight years old. He is the reason I engaged with Ajara in the first place, and his voice is heard in varying degrees in this thesis.
English Resume

*Peripheral Affects: Shame, Publics and Performance on the Margins of the Republic of Georgia*

*Peripheral Affects* represents one of the first ethnographic attempts to explore borders, peripheries or edges of the post-Soviet state as an affective form of experience. The thesis thus demonstrates an iconic example of this on the western extremity of Georgia in Ajara, located on the Black Sea along the border with Turkey. Drawing on richly detailed ethnographic research in the Ajaran borderlands, the thesis focuses on Muslim and Christianized Ajarans and the ambivalences of their never quite resolved feelings of shame. For some Ajarans in this border area, one of the reasons for this shame is connected to the place and history of Ajara, which are saturated by a distinct Muslim-Ottoman heritage, as well as the emerging cross-border flow of ideas, debts, goods, and prostitution in these Ajaran-Turkish borderlands. Peripheral Affect therefore refers both to the physical geography of Ajara and to the bodies and minds of the people who inhabit this place. It captures how, in contrast to conventional understanding, marginality is not a matter of social, political, economic, or temporal differentiation only, but a circulation of spectres of affects, such as shame as well as cynicism, optimism, fear and sympathy, which represent distinctly peripheral affects. I thus argue that, far from representing borders through pre-conceived notions of nation, ethnicity or the state, peripheral affects make such notions deeply problematic. Political violence, modernizing cityscapes and the nationalizing techniques so closely associated with Ajara since Russian colonialism can in this way be seen as part of a continual process of creating clarity out of ambivalence of Ajara within Georgia. Yet, while these efforts have failed constantly, the place proliferates and intensifies recurring feelings of shame.
Dansk Resumé

Perifære Affekter: Skam, Offentligheder og Forestillinger i Udkanten af Georgien