

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze**

*Filozofická fakulta*

*ÚBVA, Historické vědy*

**Charles University in Prague**

*Department of Near Eastern and African Studies,*

*Historical Sciences*

**Teze disertační práce:**

**Lachič, živé dědictví Ázerbájdžánu**

**Lahij, Living Heritage of Azerbaijan**

**Mgr. Galina Wood/Woodová**

Studijní obor: Dějiny a kultura zemí Asie a Afriky

Specialization: History and Cultures of Asia and Africa

Vedoucí práce:

Academic adviser:

Doc. PhDr. Jitka Malečková, CSc.

2015

## Obsah

Introduction .....	1
Multidisciplinary Literature .....	2
Terminology and Attitudes .....	5
Methodology with Fieldwork Emphasis .....	6
Research Topics.....	7
The Aspects of Lahij Identity .....	10
Abstract.....	20
Abstract (Czech) .....	21

## *Introduction*

Azerbaijan, as a hard to access and under researched country, with its specific dilemmas and ways of thinking, largely remains unknown on an international scale. While Western authors addressed nation building and identity issues in Post-Soviet Central Asia, the minority issues were bypassed. This study proposes that the time of Azerbaijani nation building is over. In the context of globalization, the new focus on the questions of minorities and their shifting identity is salient. Azerbaijan is at the crossroads of identity. The momentous timing to acknowledge the few communities, which were able to keep their relict mother tongues and cultures, might prove critical for their survival.

Within this overwhelmingly homogenized socio-linguistic landscape, there still exist a few islands surrounded by almost all-encompassing Azerbaijanization. These are small, isolated, mountainous locations with a high vitality of ancient languages. Lahij is one of these mountain sanctuaries. The community not only kept the relict Iranian language, but different layers of religion, ethos and traditional trades and crafts, such as the copper smithing. As a fortress of resistance it stands against some of the strong tides of globalization.

The topic of this research is the identity of a bilingual community of craftsmen in the Caucasus Mountains at the time immediately after the building of the Azerbaijani nation. The problem of identity is a complex, multifaceted subject. What are the different aspects subsumed by Lahij identity and what are the dynamics of *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) points of view? The religious affiliation seems at first easily labeled, but we will look into how to understand the Lahij beliefs deeper. This research will also explore how the sense of belonging is shaped under different pressures and how local sense of identity relates to morality and ethics. The moral requirements on different genders generally vary; it is interesting to explore the Lahij stand on this issue. Further, the role of reciprocity in the community function will be conceptualized.

The original research question dealt with the unknown *Tat*, an ethnic minority speaking an endangered Southwest Iranian language. The initial findings showed that the

theme needed to be adjusted to fit the linguistic and ethno-psychological reality. In 2012-2015, people who would like to be called *Tat*, or even refer to themselves as such, are rare.

Azerbaijan has other indigenous people with various cultures; however, Lahij was chosen after careful evaluation of the combination of the historical, cultural and geographical characteristics. Similar to the village of Xınalıq on top of the Şahdağ Mountains, Lahij in Niyaldağ has kept its ancient language and a traditional way of life. Compared to the Şahdağ people with a pastoral mindset, Lahij is a society with a craftsmanship town mentality and creativity.

Another case of a bilingual community speaking a Southwest Iranian language could have been the settlement of Qırmızı Qəsəbə in Quba. The Jewish *Tat*, however have been more researched due to the interest of the worldwide Jewry. Further, Lahij was preferable to Qırmızı Qəsəbə because it is far more homogenous and less transient.

#### *Multidisciplinary Literature*

The intricate identity of an unresearched people group requires a multidisciplinary approach. Works on history, politics and cultures of this and related regions shaped the conceptualization. Different points of view, from Azerbaijani national and local to Russian and Western perspectives were examined. To clarify attitudes causing language loss and the ambivalent implementation of policies meant turning to sociolinguistics. Cultural and social anthropology provided the field methods and an introduction to critical theory.

Joshua Fishman, the founder of sociolinguistics inspired my motivation and purpose.<sup>1</sup> Fishman struggled to overcome the force of inertia, which brought a vast disappearance of cultural diversity. With his vision in mind I would like to contest the conventional claim that the objectivity of research requires avoiding anything other than scientific purpose. I will be upfront that I hope some pragmatic results might follow this

---

<sup>1</sup> Fishman, J.A. "Nationality-nationalism and nation-nationism." *Language problems of developing nations*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1968. 39-52.

Fishman, J.A. "Language and Ethnicity." In *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations. European Monographs in Social Psychology 13*. London, New York & San Francisco: Henry Tajfel European Association of Experimental Social Psychology by Academic Press, 1977.

Fishman, J.A. *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical foundations of assistance to Threatened Languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1991.

academic research, benefiting the researched community according to their projected vision of their future.

The analysis of the sociolinguistic situation in Azerbaijan leaned on the first hand research of Jalə Qəribova<sup>2</sup> and John Clifton<sup>3</sup>. The historical background introducing sociolinguistic climate and nation building follows Tadeush Swientochowski<sup>4</sup> and the article of Kyle Marquardt.<sup>5</sup> The comparisons drawn between the Sovietization and present language policies are possible because of the expository work of Francine Hirsh<sup>6</sup> and Sally Cummings.<sup>7</sup>

The only Azerbaijani publication covering the *Tat* people group was written by M.M. Əliyev<sup>8</sup>. Əliyev's conclusions, illustrating the tendency to rewrite history to endorse the Turkic dominance, required some balance. Since the Western research has not dealt with the Tat, it became necessary to gather knowledge from the related fields referring to the Iranian Jews and Khazars.<sup>9</sup>

Carol Delaney,<sup>10</sup> with her experience of living among Turkish villagers, opened the door to possible comparisons. Mary Boyce<sup>11</sup> is a first-hand source on the practices of

---

<sup>2</sup> Qəribova J. and Əsgərova M. *Language Policy and Legislation in Post Soviet Azerbaijan. Language Policy and Language Planning*, John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2009.

Fierman, W. and Qəribova J. "Central Asia and Azerbaijan." In .Fishman J. A. (ed.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity: Disciplinary and regional perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 423-451.

<sup>3</sup> Clifton, J.M. *Do the Tat and Talysh languages have a future in Azerbaijan?* Baku: SIL, 2009.

Clifton, J.M. *Studies in Languages of Azerbaijan, Vol.2*. St Petersburg and Baku: North Eurasia Group SIL International and Institute of International Relations Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Swientochowski, T. *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Swientochowski, T. and B.C. Collins. *Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan*. Lanham, Maryland & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1999.

Swientochowski, T. *Russia and Azerbaijan A Borderland in Transition*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Marquardt, K.L. "Framing language policy in post-Soviet Azerbaijan: political symbolism and interethnic harmony." *Central Asian Survey* 30(2). 181-196.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.567067> (accessed 17 May 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Francine Hirsh, *The Empire of Nations, Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, London, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Cummings, S.N. *Understanding Central Asia*, Routledge, Oxon, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Əliyev, M. M. *Azərbaycan Tatlari*. Bakı: MBM, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Levy H. *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 1999.

Brook, K. A. *The Jews of Khazaria*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Delaney C., *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Village Turkish Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, University of California Press, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Boyce, M. *A History of Zoroastrianism*. Leiden, Koln: E.J. Brill, volume 1-2. 1975, 1982.

Boyce, M. *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Zoroastrian faith, drew her understanding from years of fieldwork among the Yazd and Kerman Zoroastrian communities of Iran. Her interpretations derive from the actual practices.

Anthropologists Jarred Zigon<sup>12</sup> and James Laidlaw<sup>13</sup> provided a theoretical base introducing the current debate on the concepts of morality including virtues, values and meaning. Johannes Fabian<sup>14</sup> and James D. Faubion<sup>15</sup> challenged me through their critical anthropology. While envisioning my contribution of the field method of *observant participation* I am building on their discernment.

Edward Said<sup>16</sup> through his criticism of stereotyping of the East by Orientalists made me aware of a writing style that I purposefully avoid. Consequently, Muslim women authors such as Wadud Amina<sup>17</sup>, Ahmed Leila, Mernissi Fatima, Mahmood Saba and others guided me through the relationship of gender and Islam. The few existing works about the minorities of Azerbaijan were mostly in Russian or Azeri. The reading and consequent analysis required a discerning attitude, since during Soviet times and in the time of Azerbaijani nation building certain biases were applied. History was sometimes adjusted to meet the current socio-political demands. The general tendency was to downplay first the existence, then the distinctness, of the ethnic groups. Maqsd Hacıyev,<sup>18</sup> and Qəmərşah Cavadov<sup>19</sup> are notable exceptions to that tendency. Information

---

Boyce, M. *Zoroastrians. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.

Boyce, M. *Zoroastrianism It's Antiquity and Constant Vigour*. Costa Mesa, CA and New York: Mazda Publishers, Bibliotheca Persica, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Zigon, J. *Morality An Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Berg Editorial Offices, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Laidlaw, James (2013-10-31). *The Subject of Virtue (New Departures in Anthropology)* Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition

<sup>14</sup> Fabian, J. *Time and the Other*, Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Faubion, J.D. *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition. 2011

<sup>16</sup> Said E.W. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1994

Said E.W. *Covering Islam*. New York: Vintage books, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Mahmood, S. *Politics of Piety*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Mernissi F. *Beyond the Veil*, Indiana University Press, 1987.

Mernisi F. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1991.

Wadud, A. *Quran and Woman*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

Wadud, A. *Inside the Gender Jihad*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Hacıyev M., *Toy Düyün xəzinəmizdən* ( From Our Wedding Treasures), Baki: Bilik, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Cavadov, Q. *Azerbaijanin Azsayli Xalqlari Ve Milli Azliglari*. [The Minorities of Azerbaijan] Baki "Elm" Neshriyyati Baku: AMEA, 2000.

Cavadov, Q. *Yazdim ki, izim qalsin*. [I wrote to Leave Some Footprints] Baku: AMEA, 2005.

gleaned from these local publications is presented for the first time in English. My hope is that this could help deepen the understanding of current issues pertaining to the minorities of Azerbaijan.

### *Terminology and Attitudes*

Through acquaintance with the current debate of critical anthropology I became aware of using what could be judged ‘expired’ terminology. To avoid the perpetuation of misleading connotations I will try to clarify the intended content behind some ambiguous words. For example this study juxtaposes the *traditional* type of life in Lahij with modernity confronting and modifying it. However, I disagree with those who think traditional must imply backward, regardless of whether they reached this conclusion from the Western or Soviet perspective. On one hand, those positions were tainted by domination. On the other hand, my effort aims to reveal the insider point of view, which has been marginalized.

Moreover, the Lahij craftsman acquired mastery and artistic skills that are becoming extinct. Within the context of creative expression, both the inhabitants of Lahij and Azerbaijan perceive ‘traditional’ as worthy. Further, when the locals evaluate the quality of morality, they do not usually identify modern or liberal standards as conducive to the stability of the family. Therefore, the word ‘traditional’ within their context does not carry pejorative overtones. As this research reveals, some of what is considered a ‘traditional moral code,’ when practiced turns out to be refreshingly progressive and egalitarian.

Subtle tension takes place between the diverse disciplines this work subsumes. Post-modern and post-colonial critical anthropology focuses on relativism through a variety of its expression. It emphasizes the experiential, individual reality, which is being created each moment by agency without being determined by a set of rules or historical patterns. Anthropology, as the vanguard of humanitarian sciences, promotes progress and inevitable change.

Contrastingly, history, with its conservative tendency, affirms continuity and together with socio-linguistics and sociology, keeps consistent concepts and terminology. As such, the post-structural discipline of anthropology became uneasy using terminology

implying any systematic structure or permanency. Examples are: *culture*, *worldview*, *tribal*, *traditional*, even such terms as *Islam*, etc.

I propose that it is not the terminology that is flawed, since it is not the words, but the attitudes behind them, that make the real difference.

This is partially a response to criticism from the *others*, i.e. those who were observed earlier as part of the *Orient*, such as Edward Said<sup>20</sup>, who, as a Muslim, objected to being *objectified*. In his classic *Orientalism*, he defines the discipline of Orientalism as taking Western authority over the East. One of the goals of this case study of Lahij is to let the people themselves speak on their behalf. How well I am able to grasp their side of the whole story remains a question, but my intention is to continue to learn and proceed to a deeper level of understanding.

I suggest that it is not just *co-evalness*, which is needed for the soundness of Western research, but *co-equalness* is to be granted to the others. This means starting to set the superior Western sophistication aside. When anthropologists arrive at their sites, albeit equipped with quality education, they still are entering the unknown. This is especially relevant for those who are not fluent in the languages of the people. When we become aware of our neediness to begin to unlock understanding of the culture we are immersed in, we come to see the ‘natives’ more than our equals and correspondingly allow them to become our guides. I propose that we researchers assume the role of learners.

#### *Methodology with Fieldwork Emphasis*

Although as suggested above this work is based on multi-disciplinary research, its main methodological contribution lies in the use of anthropological field methods. This research took immersive fieldwork and hopes to begin to present the insiders’ point of view for the first time. The voices of Lahij people will be conveyed through interviews and narratives.

This study hopes to contribute to a shift in methodology practiced in fieldwork by offering an *observant participation* style of acquisition. Placing the emphasis on participation and identification rather than on the distance, it argues that it is the role of ‘the other’ that needs to be reevaluated. Additionally there are two perceived benefits to

---

<sup>20</sup> (Said E. *Orientalism*, 1994, p.3).

the transition from participant observation to observant participation. Firstly, the blending in minimizes the self-awareness of the community and allows for greater naturalness. Secondly, participation could be the key to being able to perceive the insider view.

Residing in Azerbaijan made the research experiential and allowed first hand access to places and situations that otherwise would have remained hidden behind many walls. Living on land provided the opportunity to overcome significant barriers by learning Azeri and then the Southwest Iranian, or the Lahij language. Fluency in national and indigenous languages, acquired within their natural context is an indispensable prerequisite to begin to perceive the emic perspective.

Lahij fieldwork took place through cultural immersion. Multiple stays within the three years of 2012-2015, presented valued opportunities for participation. Some fieldwork took place through recurrent visits during annual holidays. Observant participation was most intense during the summer of 2013 at the time of *Ramazan*. My mentor Z.X., who was respected by the whole community, became a key to unlocking of the Lahij ways as she ushered me into the center of all events. As a seasoned woman in her seventies, she also offered practical advice as I followed her.

Part of my learning about the insider versus outsider mentality and belonging was that the Lahij people felt the need to invent and perpetuate a story that I must have had a Lahij father. To them, the fact I could communicate with them in *Löyji*, (the Lahij language) demanded an explanation that I belonged in a patrilineal way to their society. Lahij people made their own sense of circumstances, in spite of the obvious discrepancy.

Although the people knew about the scientific purpose of my stay, I tried to keep a natural atmosphere; so the interviews became conversational. Many of them happened while sitting comfortably on the ground drinking tea. Sometimes it was the questions the people asked me, which determined the next direction. Different aspects of interacting with Lahijans foreshadow the way they see different parts of their identity and how they separate the concept of ‘us and others.’ It also shows how they handle unusual cases to make them fit within their worldview.

### *Research Topics*

To be able to enter into exploration of Lahij, some background information is covered. Azerbaijan is introduced in the first chapter, and then the controversial story of

the Mountain Jews and the Tat unfolds in the second. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal directly with different aspects of Lahij identity and are illustrated with appropriate narratives, closely reflecting their attitudes, ideals, values, goals and virtues. They reveal what they perceive as meaningful.

Chapter 1. *Azerbaijan at the Identity Crossroad* presents the sociolinguistic climate of Azerbaijan as an aftermath of the process of nation building. The main argument is that the topic of marginalized minorities is the next relevant step in the progression of socio-linguistic research. This means shifting the focus from the powerful entities and titular identity to the heart languages of various ethnic groups.

Some underlying motivation of the national politics of Sovietization surface as its legacy is examined. The post-Soviet time in Azerbaijan also yields some parallels with Central Asia. The historical sketch and present situation are drawn from the perspective of a search first for the national and later multiple ethnic identities while balancing between the powerful neighbors.

Language policies outside Azerbaijan, in Europe and North America, offer divergent examples. The patterns of domination and marginalization transpire through the case of the Azerbaijani minority in Iran and the Iranian minority in Azerbaijan. Although there are several language policies for the protection of minorities, their implementation is ambivalent. The overarching goal of territorial integrity overrules other concerns. Some signs of a new awareness of multiculturalism start to appear. Perhaps it could be worthwhile to consider whether a stable bilingualism be a viable solution to the endangerment of minority tongues in Azerbaijan.

Chapter 2. *The People Who Were Labeled 'Tat'* reveals the attitudes to ethnicity of the *Tat* people, who did not participate in choosing their ethnonym. The ethnonym *Tat* first appeared in the Old Turkic runic inscriptions, and its shades of meaning varied. Reactions to the ethnonym reflect the dynamics of the outsider and insider points of view. The Mountain Jews offer their own perception to counter an attempt to erase their Jewishness.

The *Tat* language became threatened during Sovietization, and this continued through the construction of Azerbaijani nation. What caused the overwhelming effacement of *Tat* reflected in the demographic data from the 1939 census; which factors

contributed to the lack of a sense of belonging to the *Tat* ethnic group? The Jewish and Muslim *Tat* possibly share a common ancestry. The conclusions of the anthropological and linguistic research i.e. the view from the outside clash with the insider point of view. Following chapters 3-5 are the result of the fieldwork and take us to the Lahij settlement.

Chapter 3. *Craftsmanship and Creativity* opens with the narrative *The Resilient Cobbler*. This key story represents the current economic challenge and creative ability of Lahij masters to persistently overcome adversity. A closer look at the Lahij way of life using interviews and narratives helps to develop better sense for the Lahij way of life.

The government of Azerbaijan has recognized the medieval, Middle Eastern architectural building style as worthy of protection. Furthermore, Lahij is also home to a community with a unique character. The craftsmen town mentality is highlighted as its society developed specific attitudes. The history of metallurgy in the Caucasus, especially of the trade of coppersmithing, started with the prosperous Silk Road past of cottage industries. Our present days, however, pose the dilemma of economical survival. What is the role of work ethics and what do the narratives reveal about qualities, which are valued by men or women? There are many ways how Lahij masters and their perceptions contribute to the essence of Lahij. It is relevant to considering the vision of the Lahij leaders for the future of their ethos.

Chapter 4. *From Wedding to Mourning* presents vital aspects of identity through sharing of life cycle events and the responses of the neighborhood to daily situations. How does the perception of morality become apparent through the families functioning within their community? Interviews and narratives, which closely follow the core values, give voice to the people of Lahij and their expectations. Some renegotiations of customary ways and the ethical code of Lahijans are taking place. Shifts in some values occur through economical and identity crises. Further adjustments also relate to the changing status of women.

Weddings, as the beginnings of new families, are considered the greatest celebrations with intense community involvement. We will explore what do the rituals performed at the wedding reveal about an older religious substrate. The old customs in Lahij are confronted with modernity and globalization.

While the Lahij society is deemed patriarchal, this research claims a particular triangle is the real nucleus of the family. The narratives illustrate points of tension, which take place between the three persons with their roles, expectations and power struggles. Are there culturally acceptable, creative solutions to relieve the pressure of morally conflicted situations?

Within Lahij, loyalty and kindness to one's marital partner are sought after. How do women perceive the ideal and reality in the qualities they desire in marriage? It is a proper time to require in to how does the community deal with the improper behavior. Another question pertains to the Lahij expectations on the different genders. The child rearing, on one hand, aims for truthfulness and honesty. On the other hand, some lies are permitted. There is a cluster of reasoning behind the specific compartmentalization. Reciprocity is shown through participation in the events. Through customary responses to grief the community shares the painful impact of loss through death. The observant participation will reveal what role does reciprocity play in self-perception of the Lahij community.

Chapter 5. *From Fast to Feast* reveals different dimensions of religious identity through holidays and blessings. This focus on the Lahij community festivals combines a threefold aim: first, to outline present practices of Islam. Then compare them to past especially noticing the identity markers. And to explore ways in which some of the former religious thoughts and customs are manifested today.

Shia Islam is the latest religious layer on the surface of Lahij perception. We will consider whether the history could offer new insights into what seems obvious. The two distinct markers of Lahij identity are *Aşura* and *Novruz*, springing from different traditions. Although they emphasize contrasting religious symbolism, both keep their popularity. The modern developments bring a new view of Shia customs, revealing something unexpected about the folk Islam in the region.

#### *The Aspects of Lahij Identity*

The original focus of this study was a people group, speaking an Iranian language, previously identified as the *Tat* people. This outsiders' perspective had to be adjusted since it is more elusive than expected. People who would claim *Tat* ethnicity and individuals who still could speak *Tat* fluently are the exceptions.

One of the main causes for the lost interest in ethnicity is the pervading spread of the Azeri language, a principal identity marker of homogenized Azerbaijan. This results in broad assimilation and an erosion of the minority identity, replaced by the Azerbaijani one. Most of the people called *Tat* in the past are no longer bilingual, nor aware of their roots; they have dissolved within the unified nation.

Surprisingly, and against many odds, there are a few remnant bilingual communities that have kept their heart language. Today the salient problem is the survival of their mother tongues. Nation building has been accomplished, and the concepts of multiculturalism and tolerance have appeared in the public discourse; for example, at the Humanitarian Forum 2014 and the round table in Lahij in October 2015. The future will show whether the inertia of homogenization will prevail by default or if multilingualism will be pursued. Bilingualism could strengthen the territorial integrity, which seems to be currently the primary concern of Azerbaijan.

Lahij, as the heartland of a bilingual minority, is outstanding among other communities. This is due to its isolation in the mountains and the town mentality of its craftsmen. In Azerbaijan Lahij is the only settlement with a Near Eastern architectural style, where the traditional way of life and an ancient Southwest Iranian language still co-exist. Moreover, the rich oral tradition is still active, renewed with spontaneous local creativity. This close-knit community keeps its morality and togetherness strong through its commitment to caring for each other.

To begin unraveling this intricate problem, it became necessary to look for an effective approach. An anthropological method of *observant participation*, structured interviews, and narrative analysis allowed for discovering and analyzing the insider point of view. *Observant participation* hopes to add a new dimension to critical anthropology and methodology of fieldwork. This is to be done through reversed attitude. Thus it means considering *the others* more knowledgeable of their culture than we are. Fieldwork meant taking part in community events through blending in, which became the key to understanding their sense of belonging.

The Russian linguists divided the Tat into Christian, Jewish and Muslim Tat. The first group has left for Armenia, but small enclaves of the last two still live in Azerbaijan. While the ethnically mixed communities in the lowlands saw the displacement of the Tat

language by Azeri, some of the more homogenous communities in the mountains kept their vernacular. The most remarkable two examples are ‘the mountain sanctuaries’ of Qırmızı Qəsəbə with the Mountain Jews, and Lahij, representing the Muslim ‘Tat’. The inhabitants of Qırmızı Qəsəbə and Lahij still speak a severely endangered Southwest Iranian language.

The Jewish Tat in Russia have expressed their strong preference regarding their ethnonym. As a result, it has been officially changed to Mountain Jews or *Juhurihon* and their language is called *Juhuri*. This emphasizes their Jewishness, which was at times denied. The Mountain Jews identify themselves as the descendants of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Iranian diaspora. When the few references to Jews in Caucasus Albania are combined with the apostolic Jerusalem connection, there seems to be sufficient evidence for over two millennia of Jewish continuity on the same territory. The Dərbənd Mountain Jews shared that their ancestors were the Iranian Jews, who fought with Queen Esther against the genocide of their people. The outcome of this event was the Jewish Purim festival. Purim is a popular name among the Mountain Jews.

Analogously to the Mountain Jews, the inhabitants of Lahij also reject the misleading label Tat. Instead, they prefer to be addressed as Lahijans according to their toponym. Furthermore, the Lahij people prefer to call their mother tongue Lahij language instead. That way they avoid every appearance of separatism. They are bound to their heartland, which, for its climate, fruitfulness and beauty, is seen as an image of paradise.

Whereas the Mountain Jews continue emigrating to Israel, Russia, and America, the Lahijans have no dream of any life outside of their *vetən* (motherland). Some Lahijans see themselves as indigenous people, who lived on the land before the Iranian or Turkic speakers arrived. Then, they say, the Iranian tongue, which proved dominant, took over, and some of the substrate Caucasus tongues disappeared. Lahijans mostly deny any link to Jewishness. Their roots have grown deep in the land by Girdıman, where they were resettled to guard the land from northern invaders. Though the toponym Lahij likely originated from the Iranian Lahijan, currently Lahijans have no ties with Iran.

The Southwest Iranian vernacular, formerly labeled *Tat*, the Mountain Jews and Lahijans share, has no significant linguistic divergence in the two locations, divided only by one mountain range. In spite of the same anthropological type and linguistic data, both

of the given settlements perceive the two varieties of *Tat* as separate languages. They name them *Juhuri* and *Lahij* and see themselves as different people groups based on their religious designation. However, the intense practice of religion in both places might have contributed to the conservative environment conducive to the survival of their ancient vernaculars.

Their unanimous decision to reject the ethnic description, which was imposed on them, however, does not equal the rejection of their mother tongues. In spite of the fact that both communities refuse the label *Tat*, their heart language is one of the most integral parts of their identity. When a bride comes to *Lahij* she becomes a *Lahijan* through language immersion. Outside their borders the language is being lost, together with other parts of their identity, such as their traditional values. The former assets are usually traded for better work opportunities and modern comforts of life.

While the *Lahijans* do not see their bilingualism in opposition to belonging to Azerbaijan, they are burdened with the question of whether or not their mother tongue will survive. This might determine whether their children and grandchildren will be *Löyjihon* (*Lahijans*) or not. *Löyji* is the vernacular in which they express the thoughts closest to their hearts. At the same time the *Lahij* people appreciate the ability to know the language of education and media Azeri and see its economical advantage. The state language enfoldes them into a broader context of Azerbaijani citizenship. *Lahijans* combine dual loyalties. The sense of belonging to the community and the nation are not felt as divided, but only differentiated.

The outcome of the previously long habitual balance of the *Lahij* and Azeri languages used to be a *stable diglossia*. Lately, the *Lahij* language has had to compete with Azeri in its previously clearly separated domains. The current struggle is experienced through the shifting identity. This becomes most evident when *Lahijans* move outside the boundaries. Intergenerational transmission is interrupted and the mother tongue vanishes. The former identity is severely altered. This is also starting to occur even within the community, especially, when parents decide to speak the more prestigious Azeri to their children.

The *Lahij* identity is too multifarious to be prioritized or compartmentalized. It subsumes multiple aspects and undergoes several adjustments. The town craftsmanship

mentality of Lahij is built on the foundation of ancient trades. The coppersmith is a synonym for Lahij. The essence of the Lahij character is best illustrated through a popular old narrative. ‘The resilient cobbler’ survives by finding creative solutions to difficult circumstances to earn a living to feed his family. He embodies persistency and flexibility in handling economic crisis with the attitude of an overcomer. He keeps in mind that God is the one who ultimately provides. Nevertheless, *Xudo* (God) helps those who work hard.

Industrialization dealt a heavy blow to the craftsmen of Lahij. Because of that, they keep changing their purpose and style of crafts, but still manage to keep them. Both narratives and life prove that skills and creativity are highly valued. The character of Lahij represents the rigorous work ethic as a key ideal. This is true for both genders and all ages as everyone helps to provide.

When the search for work leads abroad, families are confronted with many challenges demanding reflection and ethical choices. Men in several instances yielded to the temptation to be unfaithful to their wives, but the Lahij women made the choice to remain true to the Lahij standard. Perhaps it is possible to propose that those men were conforming to the morality of Lahij within the safeguarding of their community. The women, however, might have internalized the Lahij values and held onto them even without the usual support. Perhaps they considered faithfulness a virtue, which, if lost, could be equivalent to giving up who they are. While women were perplexed at the men’s willingness to be shamed, they envied the friendship Russian husbands communicated to their ‘unworthy’ spouses.

The Lahij people pursue a family started with purity through marriage and lived out in faithfulness. Moreover, a couple’s intimacy is considered so exclusive that when a spouse dies the other does not usually remarry. While for many societies the norms for virginity and loyalty are gendered, the Lahij society demands them equally of all. The watchful neighborhood holds even men responsible for their actions. When the customary respectful relationships are broken, the community takes active steps to restore the required decency and justice.

Some strict customs, including the long isolation of the bride, have been gradually modified. The improved status of women, some of whom can get an education,

correlates with the reduced age gap between partners. Young people have more say in their choice of marriage partners. Although ‘face to face’ dating is still off limits, more communication takes place through the use of mobile phones. Customary norms are being re-evaluated under the pressures of globalization.

In Lahij family values are still relevant. One of the priorities in raising children is honesty. The standard of integrity, however, is not all encompassing. For example, different types of lies are assessed contextually. In some narratives heroes speak the truth to the point of sacrifice. Others use a measure of deceit to bring justice into a bigoted situation. When integrity and justice are in conflict, it becomes preferable to hold honesty loosely for the sake of social justice. These are cases where the rich take an advantage of the poor.

Women achieved outstanding success by reviving a carpet weaving. One of the results of the carpet-weaving boom is that the women walk freely on the streets. A woman’s baking skills are also appreciated. Symbolically, baking is linked to fertility. A praiseworthy woman is diligent, godly, and cares for her neighbors. Modesty and propriety are natural for her, strengthening family bonds. Lahij women desire their husbands to have a trade, to be faithful and kind. Although hard work and faithfulness are almost guaranteed in the men of Lahij, kindness toward a wife is rare.

The telling of narratives is still popular and encourages the townsfolk to keep overcoming their hardships. Oral creativity pertains not only to the transmission, but also responds spontaneously to new challenges. This also seems to provide relief. Two poems were composed in the summer of 2013 as a response to our dialogues.

Although some ways are changing, involvement in each others’ lives is still crucial to community function and self-perception. As a close-knit community Lahijans share daily and special events. It is true, that reciprocity might be an identity marker of any traditional, or religious community. Nevertheless, ‘togetherness’ inescapably belongs to the substance of Lahij personality. The community, rather than the individual, gets prioritized. Oral tradition tells about virtues, such as kindness and honoring of elders. In Lahij a trustworthy person is a caring one.

The community gets deeply involved in life cycle events. Both joy and grief are shared in many ways. Burial in Lahij is completely arranged by the community. One of

the immeasurable differences between Lahij and Baku is that in Lahij these rites of passage take place in the warm, individualized spaces of homes and courtyards. Correspondingly, they draw on personal involvement. The partaking in each other's lives involves a creative touch. Wedding customs have been sifted through the grid of modernity. For example, the culmination of the groom's wedding, which in Lahij is the procession walking to fetch the bride with lit up torches, is lost elsewhere. Fast-pace of contemporary life brought a mass-produced, impersonal type of wedding reception. The *şadlıq sarayı* celebrations, are meager substitutes for an authentic community participation.

Caucasus Albania was a crossroad of several Eastern monotheistic religions. Their intense interaction resulted in fusion. Lahij today represents a particular blend of beliefs and practices. Islam is apparent on the surface through the mosques and is in the forefront of recent religious consciousness. Although the reflex response to the question of religious identity is Shia, some rituals, practices, ideals and symbolism reveal the Zoroastrian roots.

Persistence of *Aşura* is a prominent marker of a Shia Islam. In Baku the month of *Məhərrəm* is kept soberly with no celebrations. But the *Aşura* ritual is undergoing transformation. Instead of the focus on self-pity and a waste of blood, Baku hospitals organize a blood drive. In this way the authentication of Islam is taking place, showing that as cultural expression, it encompasses every aspect of life. The transformation of *Aşura* through donating of blood shows flexibility and moderation of Azerbaijani Islam.

Although the Lahijans are not introspective and do not analyze their religious rituals as Zoroastrian, its ancient beliefs are present. The most permeating is its dualistic philosophy of the struggle of light with darkness, in which light wins over with the active participation of each individual. The threefold doctrine of good thought, good word and good deed has been passed on from generation to generation.

While Novruz is a beloved festival for all of Azerbaijan, it has been more fully preserved in Lahij. The key symbolism is the warmth and light of the sun and the fire overcoming the coldness and darkness. The passing from the winter to spring exemplifies the resurrection; therefore, life wins over death. The sadness, sin and impurity of the past are cleansed by different kinds of actions. The sacred power of the light of one God

symbolized by the sun, fire, torch, candle or lamp persists in wedding rituals. Although the need for keeping the hearth fire alive at all times has almost disappeared a respectful attitude to fire lingers on. The swearing done by the light and the lamp reveals the sacredness of the light. The intertwined strands of religions become apparent when the Muslims pray the *salavot* while gazing into the light. The moon is greeted when it appears anew in the sky.

There is a certain pattern to how Zoroastrian practices were preserved. While painstaking purifications are still rigorously observed in Yazd and Kerman, they have disappeared from the Caucasus. Some old rituals have kept their outward form. People go through the motions but replace the content such as the tying of a red cord around the bride's waist. The symbolism of the light winning over the darkness gets renewed each Novruz. Right thoughts, words, and actions are still the backbone of the Zoroastrian mindset continuing in the lives of Lahijans.

Another living tradition of Zoroastrianism is the *vaj* (word-manthra), which is, in this work, presented as a blessing. The Lahijans habitually respond to many daily events by a blessing. These still include *Xudo*, God, whereas some of the Azeri parallels sometimes leave God out. While the similarities point to one origin, Lahij formulas have kept a more complete form.

Blessings in Lahij embody outward expressions of inner thought. They confirm the awareness of God's presence. Like other idiomatic expressions blessings belong to the advanced stage of language. They are a mark of an insider and also affirm proper relationships and create harmony. Blessings, narratives and prayers reveal the direction toward God.

This relationship, participation in the spiritual battle and the ancient legacy of good thought, good word, and good deed transcend religious partitions. Various beliefs and practices have been fused together. People mostly do not analyze their practices or origins. They do not seem to perceive any contradiction between the life enhancing Novruz resurrection and the reenacting of martyrs' death of *Aşura*. In their lives, the seasons of joy and grief both exist. The blend of Lahij practices and thought patterns reveals deep Zoroastrian roots with an overriding recent layer of influential Shia Islam.

Some narratives and some evidence reflect traces of Judaism; however, the Lahijans mostly reject it.

The people immediately identify with Islam. Approaching God in time of need and recognizing Him through prayers, sacrifices, and blessings seems to be the way to relate to God. From the emic view it is more practical to living a moral life than the classification of the particular type of monotheism they adhere to.

Lahij has the creative personality of a master coppersmith, overcomer, living within the setting of a Near Eastern town in the Caucasus Mountains, speaking a relict Iranian tongue. A person born in Lahij to Lahij parents is acknowledged to be a Lahijan with the emphasis on the patriarchal bloodline. Growing up within the community so far ensured a mastery of the Southwest Iranian vernacular. Their heart language it is at the core of their identity, which they hope to keep passing to future generations. Having a literary status and teaching *Löyji* at school with Azeri is seemingly an unattainable dream. On one hand, *Löyji* is endangered. On the other hand, against the powerful currents of assimilation it is still a relict relic within Azerbaijan and, as such, is worthy of recognition.

Lahij masters have expressed that they would like to keep their trades alive through re-starting trade training schools. They appreciate the natural beauty and the unique creativity of their home within the country of Azerbaijan and desire to share it with others worldwide through developing special branch of cultural tourism. In Lahij it is possible to observe the cultural past of Azerbaijan and experience a way of life that has been mostly lost through assimilation. The parent generation would like to ensure that their children and grandchildren could have opportunity to make living within Lahij, which could preserve their identity. Once the children born outside lose the mother tongue their ‘Lahijness’ could be questioned. Their own desire to be Lahijans is verified by returning at least once a year to celebrate Novruz with their family. It is taking part in the most meaningful celebration of new light overcoming the darkness, which keeps their belonging current.

The function of the close-knit community is lost outside the boundaries. When men working in Russia chose unethical behavior, the Lahijans felt ashamed. This reveals that identity under crisis is tested by the local expectations. Within Lahij faithfulness is

not only ideal, but normally a reality. Thus we can conclude that the sense of ‘Lahijness’ is closely related to practicing purity and faithfulness. This affirms the family bond. The fact that the men abroad compromised essential Lahij values is condemned, but the final right of being buried in the town cemetery applies to all Lahijans. This applies even those who left this world through suicide.

To conclude, three aspects of Lahij individuality will be highlighted. I have suspected that Lahij morality and identity were related, but was surprised to find equality in expectations on both genders. The egalitarian mindset and practices of sexual morality is perhaps what sets Lahij apart from other communities most of all. Both virginity and faithfulness are expected equally from all.

The ‘togetherness’ of Lahij is perhaps the most tangible marker of belonging. It was when the women gathered to give warmth to the family grieving for the father, who committed suicide, that the meaning of being part of a caring community was realized and fulfilled. Overarching the separate religions, it is the relationship to God through life, narratives, daily prayers and blessings, which seem as natural as breathing.

Although some of the aspects of Lahij identity have been touched upon through observant participation, other topics of their ethos still remain unknown. Comparisons between the Mountain Jewish community and Lahij have been only foreshadowed. Also it would be interesting to compare the way of life of the people living in Iranian Lahijan today to the Lahijans we have come to understand. Following the Lahij people, who left their haven and some of their resettlements, for example to Georgian Gumbori, might prove to be a promising future direction. The other Caucasus minorities and their customary views and practices are still to be explored and it would be worthwhile to compare them with other native peoples including Lahijans. Research of marginalized minorities is salient, while such opportunity still exists.

The intricate identity of the Lahij community became the focus of research for the first time. As such, this study is an attempt at merely introducing the relevant topic of minorities in Azerbaijan. This field research hopes to make a contribution to understanding the complex dilemmas of a bilingual community at the time when nation building of the Azerbaijani nation had been completed.

### *Abstract*

#### Lahij, the Living Heritage of Azerbaijan

This research explores the various aspects of identity pertaining to the traditional, bilingual mountainous community of Lahij. Azerbaijan is little known and its minorities are largely underresearched. Previous work done by Russian and Azerbaijani linguists described grammatical features of the Tat language, and SIL-led linguistic field surveys by J. Clifton addressed some sociolinguistic attitudes, yet the Tat people, particularly the Lahij people, remain unknown.

This is the first time the Lahij community, which preserved a relict Southwest Iranian language and a unique culture, is a topic of inter-disciplinary research in English language. Resources such as Russian and Azeri literature and Western works dealing with related disciplines and issues (historical, sociolinguistical, anthropological...) are discussed, aiming to reach a balanced and informed perspective. To present the nuances and dynamics of the *emic* (insider) versus *etic* (outsider) points of view, anthropological methods of participant observation, structured interview and narrative analysis are used. Research was done while residing long term in Azerbaijan, and spending significant amounts of time in Lahij.

The sociolinguistic climate of Post-Soviet nation building and the promotion of titular language in Azerbaijan are presented as a background to the theme of marginalized minorities. The study argues that the building of a unified Azerbaijani nation has been accomplished and thus the focus should now shift to the endangered cultures and languages and their current identity crises. A question is posed on whether stable bilingualism could enhance the current multiculturalism in Azerbaijan, which is known for its tolerance.

The identity of the Tat is explored through the attitudes to the ethnonym *Tat*, a label, which was given, but not received. The problematic hypothesis of Tat ethno-

genesis is addressed in a response to M. Aliev's monograph on the Tat people. The official and the local perceptions are compared in an attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the underlying patterns of thought. The history and present struggles of the trade of coppersmithing, which is integral to the culture of Lahij, are considered, hoping to focus on the core of Lahij identity, while introducing the key narrative, "The Resilient Cobbler." Lahij family values and *etic* choices in a time of re-evaluation and changes in gender perception are explored through participation in life cycle events, interviews and popular narratives. Religious consciousness is shown on both the surface and underlying levels, mostly analysis of religious festivals as identity markers and the thread of daily blessings.

As the salient problem of Lahij identity is multifaceted and has its own local variations, this research is a first attempt to begin to introduce it.

### *Abstract (Czech)*

#### Lachič, živé dědictví Ázerbájdžánu

Ve světě je Ázerbájdžán zemí neprobádanou, ačkoli je úrodnou půdou zvláště pro průzkum dvojjazyčných domorodých menšin kavkazských hor. Hlavním symbolem nově vybudovaného ázerbájdžánského státu se stal sjednocující ázerbájdžánský jazyk. Ázerbájdžánština je zároveň jazykem úředním, vzdělávacím i jazykem sdělovacích prostředků. Rychle proniká do všech oblastí života, a působí tak ztrátu etnické identity, podléhající všestranné asimilaci. Dnes je ještě možné zabývat se aktuální otázkou několika zbývajících národností, které hovoří mateřským jazykem. Probuzený vědecký zájem by mohl napomoci jejich přežití.

Dlouhodobý pobyt v Ázerbájdžánu a ponoření se do prostředí horského městečka Lachiče umožnily hlubší proniknutí do dané tematiky. Některé překážky byly částečně zdolány naučením se ázerbájdžánštině a postupně i místnímu jihozápadnímu iránskému jazyku. Rozbor rozhovorů a místních povídek byly využity k lepšímu porozumění

problematiky. Hlavní antropologickou metodou se stalo *pozorné zúčastnění*. Máme naději, že použití pozměněné metody (místo *zúčastněného pozorování*) přispěje ke změně postoje k ‘domorodcům’. Hlavní smysl spočívá v zúčastnění a do jisté míry ztotožnění, či vníkaní do podstaty podílením se na událostech konkrétní společnosti. Lachičanům byla předána role učitelů, či průvodců jejich způsobem života.

Ruští jazykovědci, jako první popsali jazyk této národnosti a také rozhodli, že pojmenují dávný iránský jazyk a ty, kdo jím mluví ‘Tat.’ Jejich poznatky byly zapsány v ruštině a několik dalších publikací je v ázerbájdžánštině. Tato práce je tedy poprvé představená anglicky. K tomu, aby pohled mohl být vyrovnanější a úplnější, bylo třeba hledat poznatky z příbuzných oblastí a disciplín. Identita téměř neprozkoumané menšiny je natolik rozvětvená, že vyžadovala mezi-disciplinární přístup. Při průzkumu se uplatnila historie, sociolingvistika, srovnávací náboženství, areálová studia a antropologie.

Sám ‘Tatský národ’ si toto etnonymum nevybral, a proto ho i zamítl. Židovští i muslimští ‘Tatové’ dávají přednost jinému sebeurčení. Znamená to však, že také odmítají i svůj původní mateřský jazyk? Komu jsou věrní a existují v jejich věrnosti určité rozpory? Jak si představují svůj historický původ? Souhlasí s hypotézou ázerbájdžánského dějepisce?

Lachič vyniká mezi ostatními domorodými společnostmi svou městskou řemeslnickou povahou, pílí a tvořivostí. Od dob Hedvábné stezky proslul hlavně řemeslem měditepců. Pozdější ekonomická krize Lachičany zaplavila levnými továrními výrobky. Povahu Lachičanů nejlépe vystihuje postava nezmarného ševce z oblíbené lidové povídky. Dennodenně musí překonávat překážky svou houževnatou tvořivostí, aby dokázal uživit svou početnou rodinu. Mnozí mistři z Lachiče také mění způsob svého řemesla, aby udrželi práci. Jiní odjíždějí za výdělkem do velkoměst i za hranice. Nové prostředí však ohrožuje jejich rodinu i identitu. Jak na to reagují muži a jak ženy? Čeho si Lachičané váží? Jak si místní mistři představují budoucnost řemeslnictví a Lachiče?

Dají se z toho, jak rodina v Lachiči plní očekávání, rozeznat jejich ideály? Liší se podstatně norma od skutečnosti? Jak se trestají případné přestupky? Očekává se něco jiného od mužů či žen? Jakou má hodnotu vzájemná pomoc a účast?

Svátky a jejich oslavy odhalují některé jinak skryté stránky náboženství. V

Lachiči jsou nejdůležitějšími svátky *Novruz* (Nové světlo/den/ rok) a *Aşura*. Oba patří k odlišné náboženské tradici a představují protikladné symboly. Jak se dnes projevují staré prameny náboženství? Jaký druh islámu je v Ázerbajdžánu? Podle jakých zákonitostí se zachoval zoroastrismus? Jaký smysl má symbolismus, modlitba a požehnání?

Lachič je jedinečné místo, postavené ve východním stylu, kde ještě tvořiví řemeslníci mluví starodávným jihozápadním íránským jazykem. Pospolitost a různorodá identita Lachiče je zachycena poprvé. Tato studie se pokouší uvést aktuální a důležité problémy menšin Ázerbajdžánu. Lze doufat, že přispěje k hlubšímu pochopení složité situace menšin v období po završení budování jednotného Ázerbajdžánu.

This map shows the geographical context of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan is the large green area, with its capital Baku marked with a star on the Caspian Sea coast. To the west is Armenia (pink), and to the south is Iran (light blue). Nagorno-Karabakh is a light green area within Azerbaijan, with its capital Stepanakert marked with a star. The map includes numerous cities and towns, as well as the Kura and Aras rivers. The text 'Nagorno-Karabakhskaya (Autonomous Oblast)' and 'Nagorno-Karabakhskaya (Autonomous Republic)' are overlaid on the map, indicating the region's status.



Lahij-remote mountainous settlement of Azerbaijan



First dirt road to Lahij from 1970 through Niyaldağ



Traffic jam on the road



River Girdiman, the guardian of paradise



Fortress for the traditional community



Məllim Dadaş Aliev, now the director of the Tourism Information Center



7th generation coppersmith



Town versus country mentality: ground floor workshop in Lahij, but animals in the village



Tradition are shown through celebrations like:

# Novruz—New Year 2012



From winter to spring season



Competing showing manly strength



Dancing on the square



Baking pahlava



Lights in the home



Musicians add to the festive atmosphere



Cleansing bonfire



Gryz girl cleaning the wool

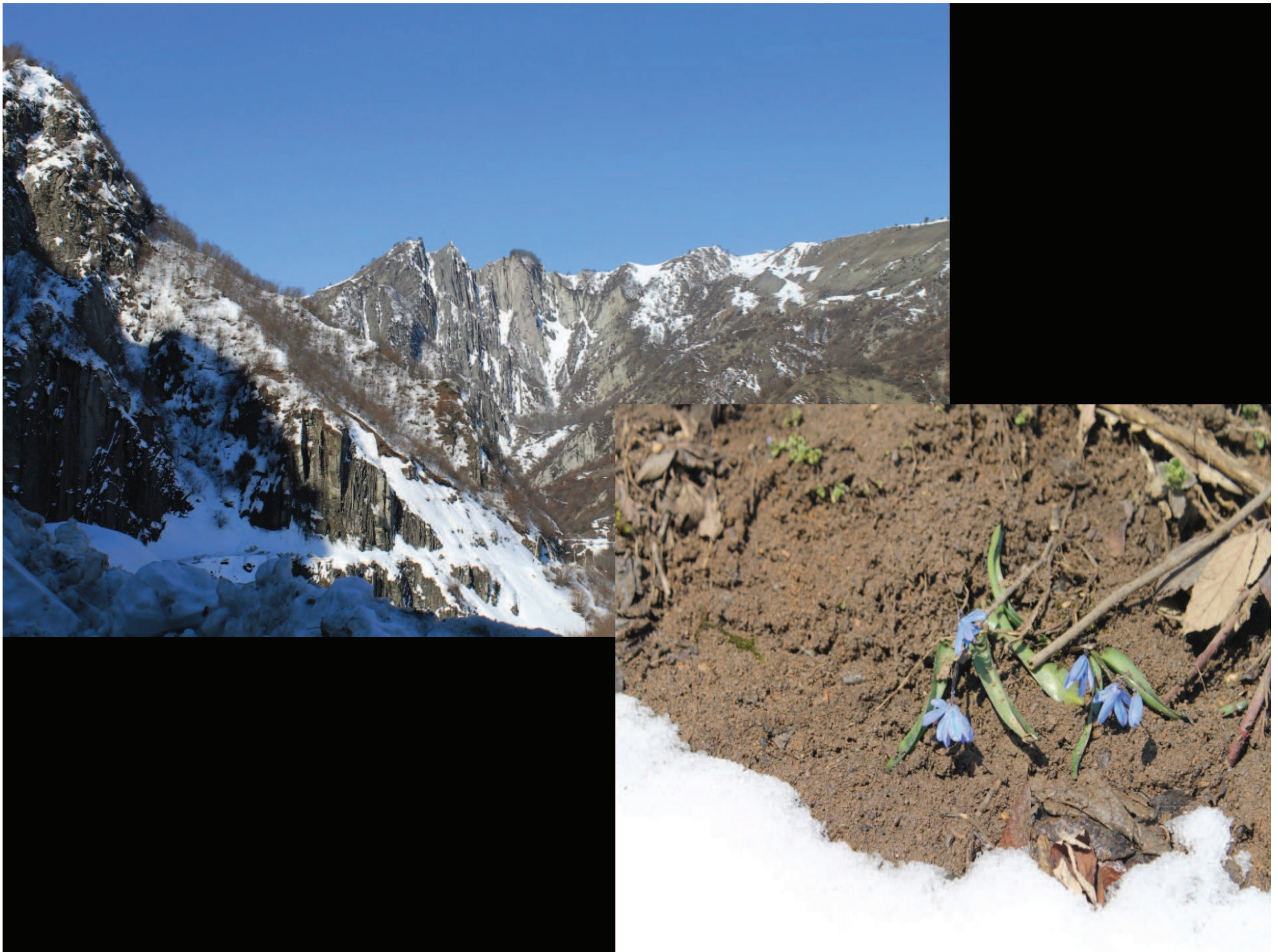
The warmth of the Sun overcomes the frost



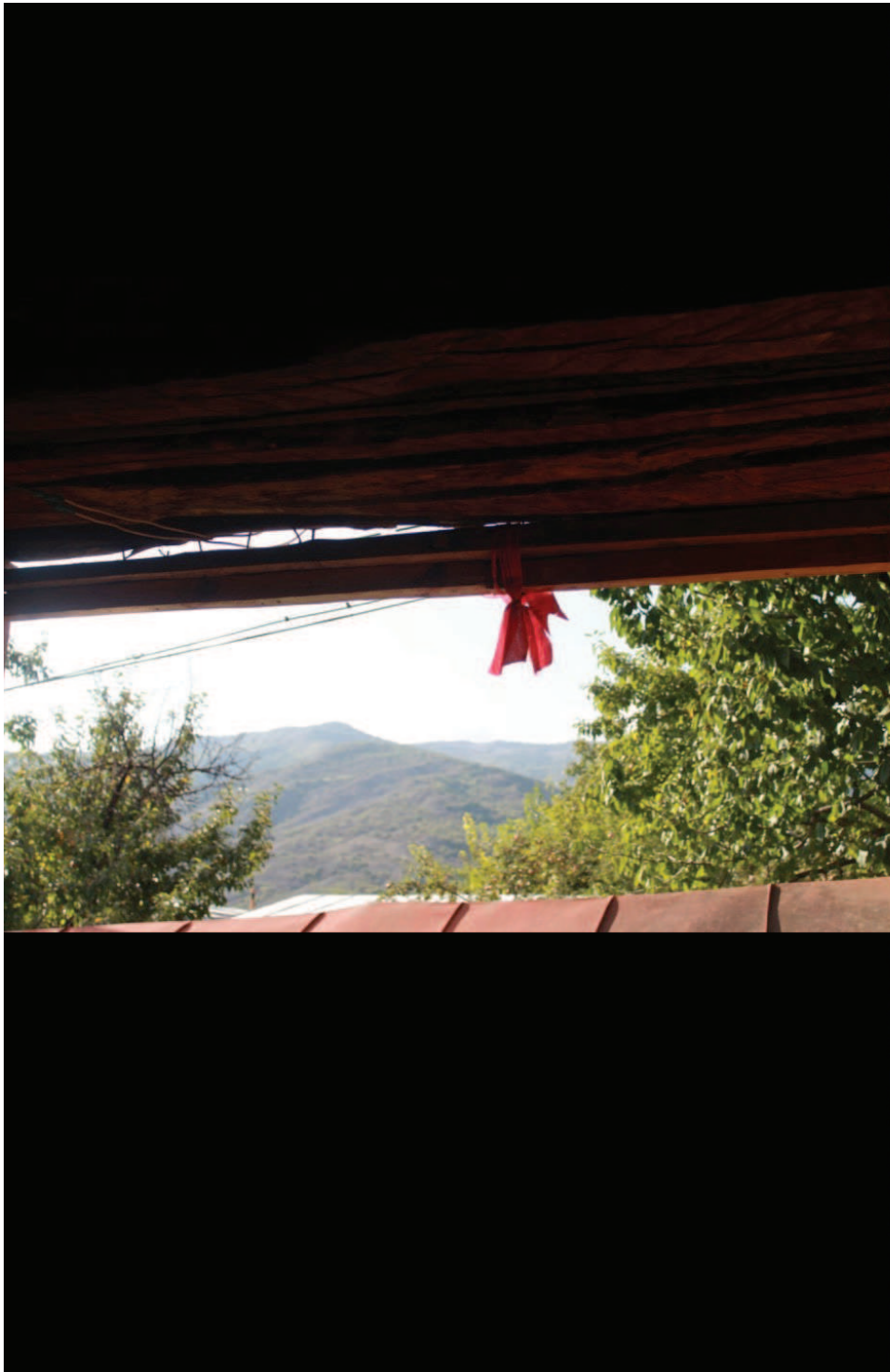
The wood will bring warmth home



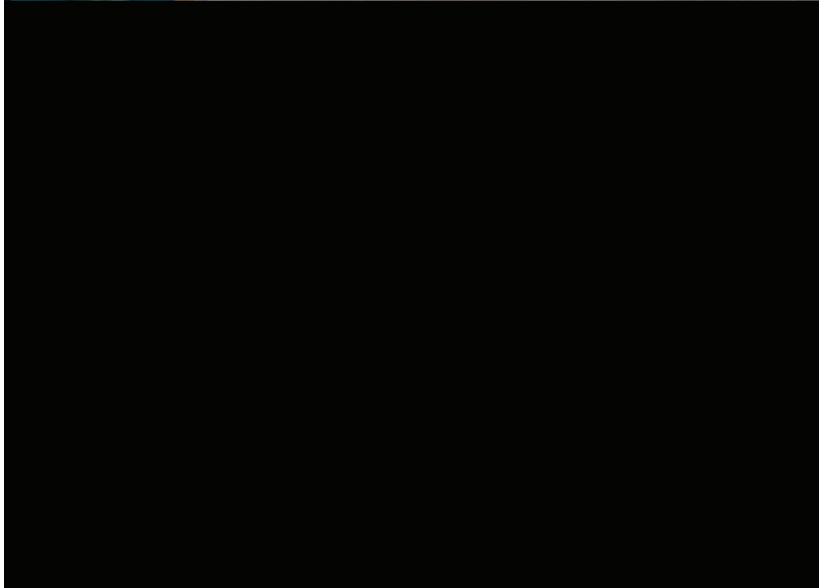
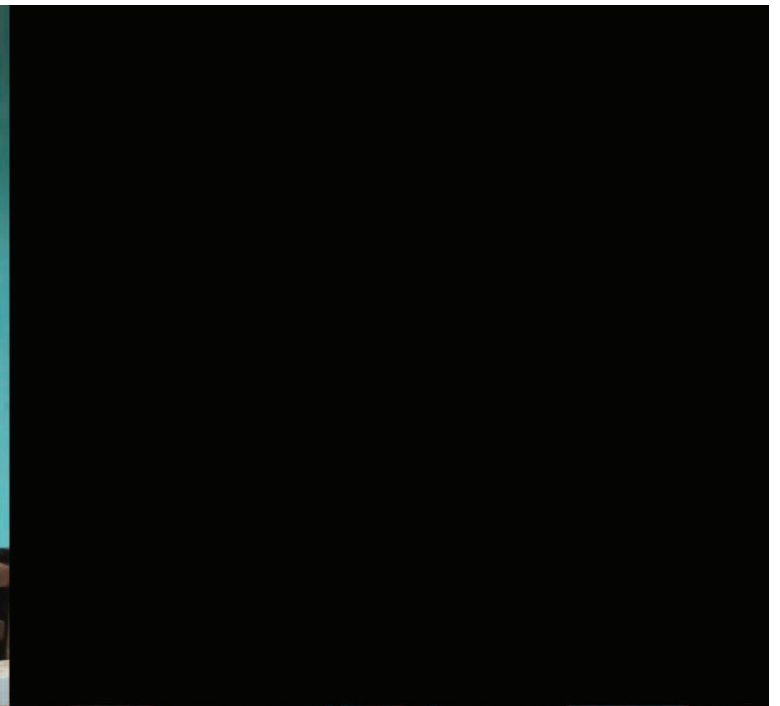
The fresh sprouts symbolize new life



The first flowers bring the spring victory



Musicians guide through the wedding



The wedding blessing: Always be at the wedding!



Osh with rice pilaf



Hot tea from the antique samovar served by Maarif



Osh topping



Dulma wrapped in quince leaf



Red bow marks a wedding home



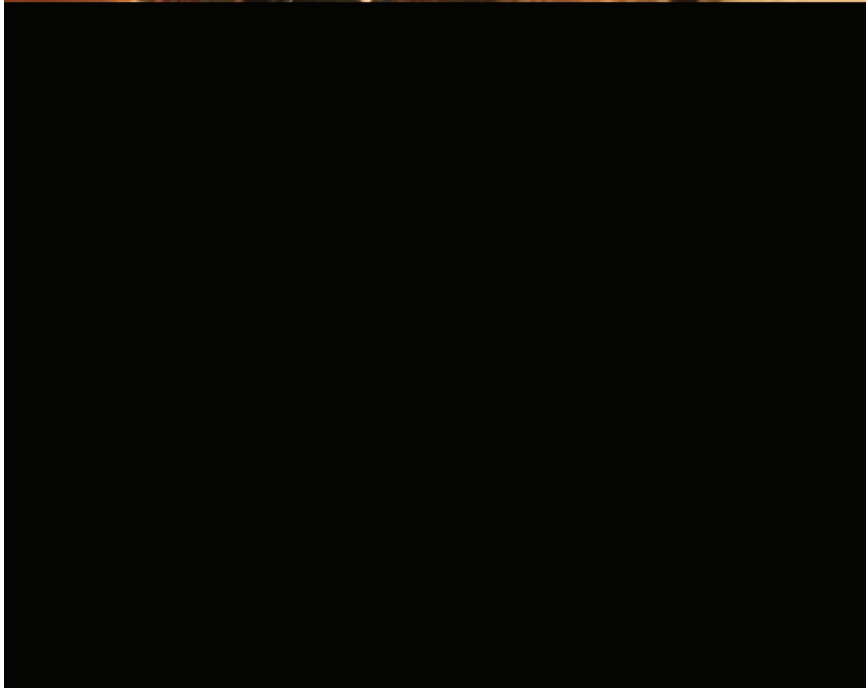
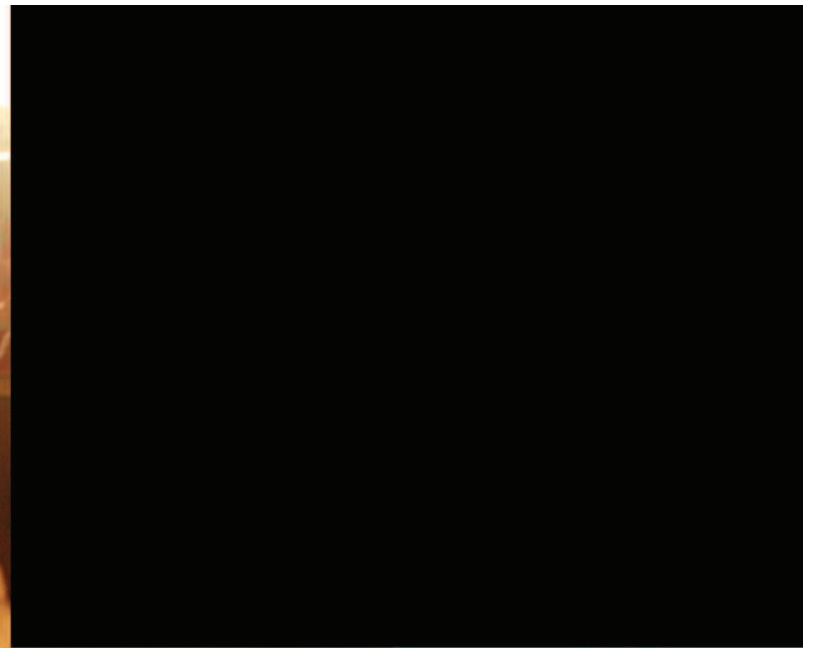
Blessing: Be happy together!



Sharing the joy of the bridegroom

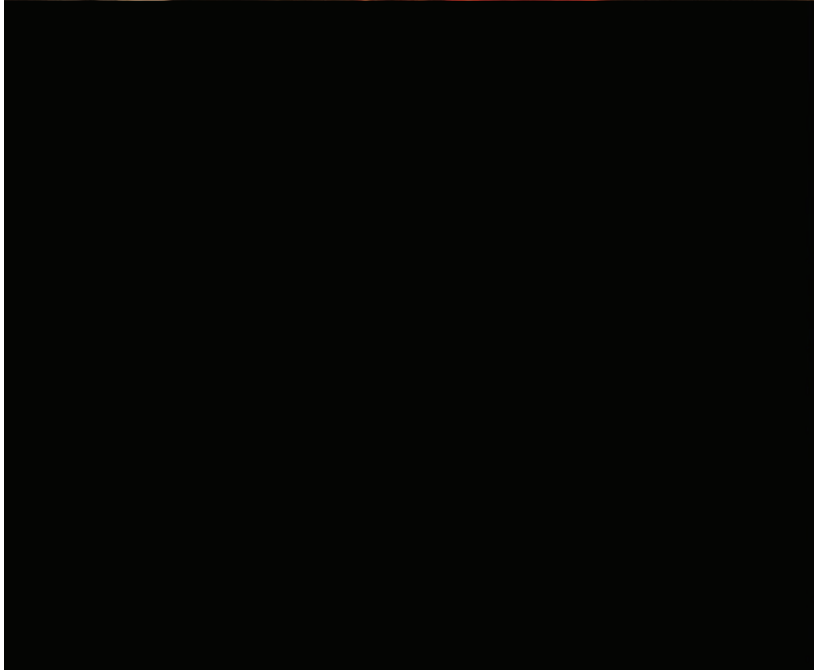
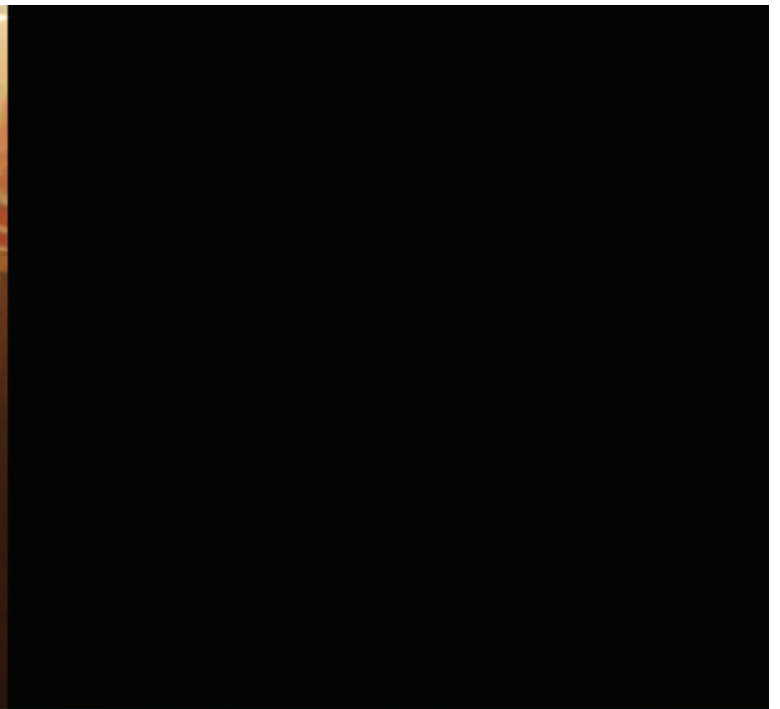


The procession fetches the bride at night



Breaking of the bread to have always food

Leaving home is not easy



Scripture

Welcome to bridegroom's home



Blessing for the couple: May you raise many children and be happy together!





Blind horse gear maker



Horse carries sheep for the butcher



Blacksmiths making the nails



Putting shoe on the horse



Selling socks with cosmic motives



Fetching water with a copper jug



Taylor



Director of the folklore ensemble in a costume



Tourist posing for pictures



Grandma gathering herbs



Granddaughter with her chicken



Tourist riding horses



Lahij cowboy



Niyaldağ