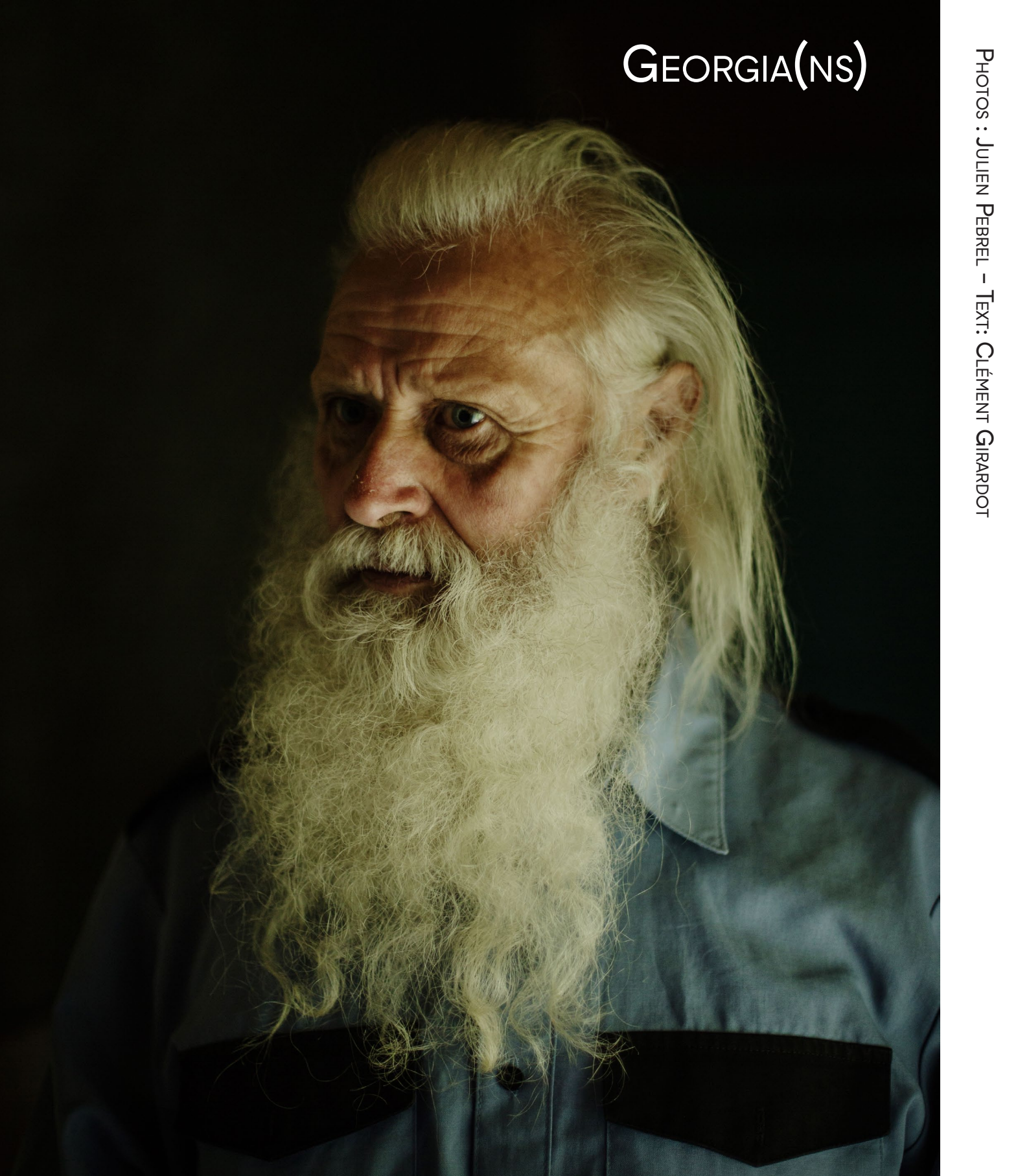


GEORGIA(NS)

PHOTOS : JULIEN PEBREL - TEXT : CLÉMENT GIRARDOT



These images were taken in 2017 during a trip in Georgia with journalist Clément Girardot.

To reach Tbilisi from Batumi we avoided the main road and took a further south track, near the Turkish and Armenian borders to meet the ethnic and religious minorities who make up the country.

This other way, more adventurous, crosses the steep mountains and the wild highlands. These are long isolated areas, populated by many ethnic and religious minorities. In the course of a long road of only 450 Km, there are a dozen minorities: Adjarians, Meskhetians, descendants of German colonies in Kvemo-Kartli, Armenians who are the majority population in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Greeks in the Tsalka region, the Doukhobors in the village of Gorelovka, the Azeris in the south-east of the Kvemo-Kartli region, the last Jews of Akhaltsikhe, the Catholic Georgians (whereas the Georgian identity is closely linked to orthodoxy) ...

Since the end of the USSR, the identity policies of each Caucasian nation-state and the ethnic conflicts have led to a strong homogenization of the populations. And Georgia is not an exception with strong nationalist policies and the influence of the Orthodox Church. Southern Georgia and its diversity are still an exception, but the dynamics under way are homogenizing: the Meshketians are unable to assert their right to return, the Germans have left, the Jews as well, and without the crisis in Greece, the Greeks would have done the same, the Doukhobors prefer to go to work in Russia, the Catholics convert to orthodoxy, etc

How long will this region retain its multi-ethnic character so typical of the Caucasus?

PHOTOS

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Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia

A rainbow after the storm. Zortikheli is the mountain pasture village of the inhabitants of Ghorjomi. A big part of the men and some families come here for a few months with their cattles. They have everything here: shop, school, etc



Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia

A man feeds his horse. Horses are mainly used by men to accompany cattles in the pasture.



Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia

Memet lives in Ghorjomi, he's a relative of Zihal. As a lot of people from Ghorjomi he moved to Zortikheli during summer with his cows.



Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia.

A woman goes and pick her animals while clouds arrive on the village and rain threatens.



Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia
The village during a storm.



Adjara, Georgia
On the road to Zortikheli, a man takes his cattle to the village.



Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

Nikolaï is one of the members of the Doukhbor community of Gorelovka. He left to live in Russia as a lot of members of the community but recently he decided to come back to the village. He shares his life between Sotchi (Russia) and Gorelovka. Gorelovka used to be the settlement of a large Doukhobor community, an orthodox sect which has fled Russia in the 19th century: they are pacifist, they don't have priests, churches or icons and advocate a direct link with god.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

In the yard of an Adjarian family, a fish in a holed plastic bag.



Tbeti, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia
The vestiges of a church, in the Tsalka artificial lake.



Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

The priest of the Armenian church of Akhalkalaki, a town mainly inhabited by Armenians.



Akhalsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

The Jewish cemetery of Akhalsikhe occupies a big hill above the synagogue. Akhalsikhe had a very important Jewish community in the past. Almost all of them have left to Israel. Only a few families remain today.



Ghorjomi, Adjara, Georgia
An Adjarian woman in her house.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

In the community house of the Doukhobors. This bed is supposed to have been the bed of the chief of the community.



Ghorjomi, Adjara, Georgia

In the village mosque. Ghorjomi population is muslim, an inheritance from the times when Adjara was part of Ottoman Empire. Orthodox religion is re-establishing in Adjara, but in remote villages as Ghorjomi, islam is still very strong.





Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

As cows are coming back from the fields, an Adjarian woman comes to pick her animals. Adjarians who arrived in the region are climatical refugees, they fled landslides in Adjara.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
A sheperd and his horse.



Ghorjomi, Adjara, Georgia

The economy of Ghorjomi is mainly based on agriculture, and especially potatoes. Due to the relief, works are still done manually. Ghorjomi population is muslim, an inheritance from the times when Adjara was part of Ottoman Empire. Orthodox religion is re-establishing in Adjara, but in remote villages as Ghorjomi, islam is still very strong.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Adjarian women from Gorelovka are preparing heating bricks with cowpat.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Adjarian women from Gorelovka are preparing heating bricks with cowpat.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Armenians are destroying a traditional Doukhobor house to extend their house. Armenians and Adjarians are now the majority of the village.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

Nikolai in the middle of his garden where he raises hundreds of different kind of herbs and flowers. He uses it for eating and traditional medicine. Doukhobors are know for their traditional way of life.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

A young man fishing in the very polluted small river which crosses the river.



In a forest next to Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Kids acting a traditionnal Georgian tale about the God of
the forest.



The road between Ghorjomi and Zortikheli, Adjara, Georgia



Vardzia, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

Vardzia is a very important cave orthodox monastery from the 12th century, linked to Queen Tamar, an important figure of Georgian History. Today it is an important site for tourism and pilgrimages.



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Tbeti, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

A greek woman in front of the small Tbeti church where she came to pray.



Tsalka, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

Tsalka is an important center of the Greek community. For many years many a lot of inhabitants have lived between Greece and Georgia to enjoy some advantages in Greece. The improvement of the situation in Georgia and the Greek crisis have prompted some to return.



Tsalka, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

In the Greek church. Many Greeks still come to this church but the Mass is now said in Georgian by Georgian priests.



Akhalsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

In the synagogue of Akhalsikhe. One person still takes care of the synagogue. A dozen of Jews remain today in the city. They wait impatiently in the morning that some foreign Jews tourists arrive to be able to pray with them.



Akhaltsikhe, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
The man who takes care daily of the synagogue.



Ghorjomi, Adjara, Georgia

Natia milked her cow in the early morning. She has only one cow for their own dairy products. Her husband Zihal and she try to develop an economy not based on agriculture.



Ghorjomi, Adjara, Georgia
Zihal, tries to play accordion in his house.



Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

In a chess course for the Armenian community. Chess is a kind of national sport for Armenians. In Armenia it is taught at school like mathematics or history.



Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
A boxing class in the city gymnasium.



Khiza Vabra, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

In a small abandoned building used as a bus stop, retirees play cards. The village is historically Catholic, which is very rare in Georgia. The inhabitants would have converted to the arrival of the Ottomans to be protected by the Vatican. Orthodoxy, which is very important in the Georgian identity, has made a comeback in recent years in the village.



Gorelovka, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

Adjarians came to settle in the village a few years ago due to landslides in Adjara. After a few years they recovered a traditional Doukhobor house and made it into a mosque without any problems which is surprising as in Batumi the construction of a new mosque is controversial and is blocked.



Abastoumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

The old village mosque. Abastoumani was inhabited by a very large meshket community deported to Siberia by Stalin after the Second World War. After leaving to live in Turkish-speaking countries (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) some tried to return to live in Georgia following the favorable signs of the former President Saakashvili. But today they have great difficulties in obtaining citizenship.



Abastoumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

A young meshket woman who lived in Azerbaijan and returned to Abastoumani. She is happy to have returned to the land of her ancestors, but she still does not have a Georgian passport ...



Abastoumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Meshkets take care of their chicks



Abastoumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
A meshket woman observes the damage in her garden after the floods the day before.



Khiza Vabra, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
Playing volleyball during recess at the village school



Khiza Vabra, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia

An inhabitant of the village brings back the village cows in the evening. The villagers fulfill the role of shepherd in turns.



Khiza Vabra, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
The return of the sheeps in the evening.



Khiza Vabra, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia
A lady, high school teacher, prepares coffee at home



Asureti, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

One of the last Germans of the village. When USSR entered in the Second World War, all Asureti's Germans were expelled. Only a few mixed families were allowed to remain. The German colony of Asureti was founded around 1820.



Asureti, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

The ancient church of Asureti was transformed into a cultural center after the War before being abandoned. Today only a very small part is still functional. The remainder is abandoned and should be renovated. Some programs have been put in place to enhance the German heritage of the village.



Marneuli, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia

An Azeri lady in the bazaar of Marneuli. A large majority of the vegetables eaten in the country is grown in the region.

