

Who Gets to Determine the Truth? Personal, Cultural, and Political Narratives in Nino Haratischwili's *Juja* and *Das Achte Leben (für Brilka)*

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I first learned about Nino Haratischwili the summer after my freshman year while studying Russian in Tbilisi, Georgia. Haratischwili, born in Georgia in 1987, is a contemporary German-language author, as well as playwright and theater director. While acclaimed in Germany, Haratischwili's work has not begun until recently to garner much attention in English-speaking countries. For the scope of this research project, I chose to focus primarily on two of her novels, both in German: her first novel, *Juja* (2010), and arguably her most famous novel *Das Achte Leben (für Brilka)* (2014). These novels comprised over 1500 pages between them. While I was initially interested in exploring the treatment of women and migration as general themes of these works, this soon combined and expanded into a more general focus on how different narrative versions were treated within these texts.

In our current era, between the advent of the internet and an increasingly polarized political climate, the borders, if any, between fact and fiction feel increasingly blurred. As a result, one may be inclined to wonder whether the difference between the two is significant at all. When it seems that all power is concentrated in the hands of those who follow a certain political narrative, or that all of the answers to life's problems are found in a singular strand of cultural thought, why not just take the path of least resistance? If enough people govern their lives by an idea, does that not make it true, to some degree? Is it not far simpler to strive towards narrative uniformity, rather than risk unrest or stagnancy by dealing with every unique perspective?

Through the story of an abstruse French text that binds together the lives of five characters around the globe in *Juja*, and through the six-generational saga of a Georgian family amidst the upheavals of the twentieth century in *Das Achte Leben*, novelist Nino Haratischwili confronts these kinds of questions. *Juja* and *Das Achte Leben* detail the importance of preserving one's personal sense of "narrative," whether that be historical, or literary, or both. In these two texts, Haratischwili shows that blind subservience to any one system of belief, no matter how grand the narrative, whether it be the seemingly all-encompassing literary manifesto of *Juja* or the oppressive force of the Soviet Union in *Das Achte Leben*, is ultimately destructive and cannot result in a truly fulfilling life.

At Bowdoin, I am double-majoring in German and Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies with a concentration in Language and Literature. This coming academic year, I will be studying abroad at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich through the Junior Year in Munich Program. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity through Bowdoin's summer research program to continue to deepen my experience reading academic German and expand my understanding of contemporary German literature in advance of taking this next step in my academic career. I am also considering ways to continue this research as part of a senior thesis.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Jill Smith

Funded by the Martha Reed Coles Fellowship