

Researching Common Territories



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INTRODUCTION

by Onur Ceritoglu

The summer school “Researching Common Territories” took place in the Marneuli region of Georgia, neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan, between September 5 and September 11, 2022. The empirical part of the program focused on the fieldwork that aimed to document everyday practices and commons within an intensive week. The school brought together participants of different nationalities with diverse backgrounds in journalism, architecture, filmmaking, and anthropology.

The base camp was in Tserakvi village. From there, daily excursions were made to the border villages (Sadakhlo, Shaumiani, and Shulaveri) and the city of Marneuli with the support of local mediators and mentors speaking the region’s languages. The groups primarily focused on common territories that currently function as public spaces: quiet streets, struggling bazaars, men-occupied tea houses, a forgotten library. Yet, they also encountered less frequented relics of the past, like abandoned factories.

During their field research, each group aimed to understand daily practices, often through the lens of food. Some visited the households of villagers to contact women and learn about their domestic life. The villagers welcomed them with great hospitality and showed them some of their traditional dishes. Witnessing multi-ethnic togetherness in the border region, the participants not only mapped the landmarks of the villages but also gathered stories about migration, regional politics, and traditional culture.

As a part of the Tbilisi Architecture Biennial 2022, the outcome of the summer school was presented at Praktika Café in Tbilisi. The event hosted the participants’ observations in different mediums: photo prints, documentary videos, poems, sketches, and research memoirs. This publication assembles these invaluable outcomes of the summer school in printed format to document and archive what was achieved in a short time.

Cover photo: Shulaveri (2022), by Nutsa Lomsadze

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Shaumiani (2022), by Roser Corella

IN THE SEARCH OF COMMON NARRATIVES

by Klaudia Kosicińska

Whose Kvemo (Lower) Kartli is? Is it more Georgian, or is it Azerbaijani or Armenian? Is it possible to find a common narrative between every group that lives here? I have been searching for it since 2015, when I first came to the region. It has become notable that the measure of nationality is not reflected in the borderland. There is diversity but also a commonality in the experience of living close to the border, looking at the same landscape every day, and belonging to different social networks.

Marneuli municipality, located in the Kvemo (Lower) Kartli region, is a mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, tastes, landscapes, religions and languages. It embodies an unusual history of the borderland, peculiarities of belonging, no simple answers, no obvious attributions.

This southeastern part of Georgia has yet to exist in the broad consciousness of those not only visiting the country but also of those living here. Only geographically is this territory automatically attributed to the Georgian state. With less than fifty kilometers between Marneuli and Tbilisi, it seems close to the capital, but the real gap is much broader, filled with mutual perceptions and prejudices. It is said that the region feeds the entire republic, as it is the main supplier of tomatoes and cucumbers in particular. Here, some residents call this territory Sakartvelo, while others call it Vrastan, Gürcüstan, or Borchalo. Buildings of historic mosques are adjacent to Orthodox churches. Stores with Azerbaijani names also display writing in Georgian and Armenian. At least two languages are spoken in almost every

school. Here, a passport is as little a measure of ethnicity as language is one of nationality or citizenship.

The main town of the municipality, Marneuli, is home to around 20 000 people. Here, one makes appointments at the local government office, collects income and pensions from ATMs, receives money by bank transfers from relatives in Russia, Poland, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, sends money, or arranges loans. There is a big bazaar in the city where everyone – Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and Armenians – sell their products. It operates every day, and you can find almost everything here. Fruits, vegetables, many kinds of cheese, meat, flour, and other grains. Candy, clothing, shoes, cigarettes, cosmetics, school supplies, household goods, wedding accessories, and music can also be found here. Writing this text, I still have vivid sounds running through my head, pulsing with the rhythms of Azerbaijani national music mixed with disco, like in the song by Niyameddin Musayev “The world is mine, the world is yours.” It is also here where locals from other municipalities of Kvemo Kartli buy products, especially vegetables – because contrary to the opinion circulated in Georgia about Marneuli residents, not everyone has a piece of land for private use. One of the most common sources of income in spring and summer is seasonal work in greenhouses. One such place, located on the outskirts of the municipality borders, also hires Georgians from Western regions. The market is home to a popular private store called “optovoy”, a discount store set up in the backyard of a two-story house. Several young men sitting behind benches attend to the customers. They rely on calculators as well as an abacus, and then write down the amount of “credit” left to be repaid or what has just been repaid in a notebook. Like almost everywhere, the bazaar is the main center of social life.

When we move sixteen kilometers from Marneuli towards the borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan, we are in Shulaveri

– a historical, post-industrial, economically declining village, a former urban-type settlement with approximately one thousand five hundred and fifty inhabitants of many ethnicities. It used to be a local urban center. Due to its proximity to the border with Azerbaijan and Armenia, it has been inhabited for centuries by people of non-Georgian origin. In the Soviet period, factories were established here, to which various peoples of the former republics were drawn for labor. Conditions developed in which multiple minorities, not only Armenian, Azerbaijani, or Georgian, but also Russian, Ukrainian, and Greek coexist.

The town and its surrounding villages were centered around the factories and their infrastructure. All this together created an interesting mosaic of class, nationality, language, and religion. Former manufacturers in Shulaveri, like the wool factory, were semi-fabrication centers.

Processed fur and animal skin were imported from abroad (e.g. Australia), then they were cleaned, sorted and exported for the next stages of processing. These were the most prominent manufacturers.

At other surrounding factories, tobacco from nearby Sovkhozes (state-owned farms) was separated. Fragrance oils and aircraft fuel were brewed from oil extracted from local plants. Silk and military clothing made of felt were also produced here. Once these centers attracted the confidence of labor, yet today, little remains. The buildings around the train station have disappeared, and all that is left are a few multi-family townhouses in need of renovation. Occasionally, one will see a little red star on the facade of a building, the former cultural house, or accidentally come across another piece of atrophied infrastructure, such as the former square. Once called Lenin Square, it is now an overgrown piece of concrete with a statue of a leader who no longer exists. The former main entrance to the factory still exhibits the remains of two bas-reliefs depicting Georgian folk and religious motifs.

“Once called Lenin Square, it is now an overgrown piece of concrete with a statue of a leader who no longer exists.”





Top: Former wool factory in Shulaveri (2022), by Klaudia Kosicińska
 Left: Local shop in Shulaveri (2022), by Marie-Luise Schega

One of the oldest railroad stations in Georgia is also located here, as the trackman Huseyn tells us. It was established in 1899 by the order of Tsar Nicholas II on the route of the then newly opened main road leading to Armenia. The station building is still operating, almost unchanged, and Huseyn proudly boasts of more than thirty years spent in this position. Here he can rest while at the nearby house there is always plenty to do tending to the garden and animals. For vacations, he and his family used to go to the resort town of Tskaltubo, located in western Georgia. Border closures, however, prevent him from seeing his daughter, who lives in Baku with her family, so he stopped thinking about vacations long ago. Work keeps his spirit balanced. Before the pandemic, this too was easier as there was more to do at the station – the passenger train from Armenia to Tbilisi was constantly running. It stopped working in 2020 when the pandemic began. Recently, after the border with Armenia reopened in 2021, the

train resumed operating, but it no longer stops at the Shulaveri station. Spending the summer of 2018 here, I listened to many stories about how full of life and exciting the surroundings of the station used to be. At the time, no one expected that the former town could fall even further. Now, Huseyn is bored and resting against his will. The problematic railroad is also taking its toll on the wallets of residents who are forced to pay on average twice as much as before to travel by buses and shared taxis to the capital.

Localisation on the railroad route and border convenience at the beginning of the century allowed Shulaveri to become one of the fastest-growing industrial territories in the Caucasus. This situation lasted until the early 1990s, when the political system changed. Until then, hundreds of people could find work here; according to the stories of locals, more than five thousand workers were employed in the fur-processing factory, and on a single day, ten thousand

people worked several shifts. After 1991, the Soviet Republic collapsed and with it its economic infrastructure in Georgia. The Shulaveri factories began to be closed and gradually fell into disrepair and oblivion. Left without an occupation, many migrated abroad, mainly to Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. New residents arrived to replace those who once came for work and left, sometimes to show their disagreement with the new order after the regime change and to find a new source of income. They were internal migrants from other areas of Kvemo Kartli, internal refugees from the northern regions of Georgia, and occasionally war refugees from Azerbaijan and Armenia after the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Further, at the end of the 1980s, several mudslides happened in the Western part of Georgia, causing extensive damage to homes in places like the mountainous municipalities of Shuakhevi. Its inhabitants received the possibility to move to the Eastern part of Georgia and restart their life in those Shulaveri's apartment buildings that used to house factory workers.

From every single place in Shulaveri a hill called Surdash is visible. The mountain looks magical, rising in the direction of Shaumiani. The view of the mountain noticeable from all sides of Shulaveri draws everyone in its vicinity and leaves an unforgettable impression. According to locals, the name Surdash is a combination of words from two languages, Armenian and Azerbaijani. Sur means "sharp" in Armenian and dash is "stone" in Azerbaijani. It is also called "Shulaveri mountain" and simply "Skala". It majestically marks the boundaries of the two towns. On Easter, Christians – Armenians and Georgians – climb it to pray under the cross at its peak. Among young Azerbaijanis, it is a leisure place. It takes around one hour to climb it, as I checked in the early Spring of 2021. In summer, it is avoided by everyone because of venomous snakes.

"New residents arrived to replace those who once came for work and left, sometimes to show their disagreement with the new order after the regime change and to find a new source of income."

Nowadays, Shaumiani is situated a few kilometers from Shulaveri, but these two towns used to be one unit called Shulaveri before the division into two administrative villages. Now Shaumiani is the biggest Armenian village in Marneuli, a daba (rural-urban center) with a population of around 3000 (it used to be a local administrative center and the main town of the municipality – with almost 8000 people in 1914). Shaumiani is famous for its historical urban buildings and brick houses. The famous Georgian painter Niko Pirosmiani is said to have lived sometime in the town during his early youth. The town boasts its status as the former main urban center of the area. Walking through the city you can even find the same type of door handles as in older parts of Tbilisi. It might not be surprising, as many Armenians from Shaumiani have settled in districts of the Georgian capital and later contributed to the city's architecture.

Armenians are known for making tasty wine which is also sold among Azerbaijanis. Indeed, the area has good soil for grape cultivation. During archeological excavations on the historical territory of the ancient Shulaveri-Shomu culture, grape skins and pips inside old qvevri (clay) vessels and pots containing dusty remains of cultivated vines were found. They date back to the 6th millennium BC. Wine does not play such an important role in the economic life of the local population as it used to, but many families in Marneuli, like in all of Georgia, keep grapes in their yards for different use. This grape is really delicious.

On the outskirts of Shaumiani, a settlement of internally displaced Georgian refugees from the Samachablo region, also known as South Ossetia, is located. Just a few kilometers from the border with Armenia is one of the two most prominent villages in Marneuli: Sadakhlo. It is inhabited by Azerbaijanis and followers of both branches of Islam – mostly Sunni, but



Chaikhana in Marneuli (2022), by Klaudia Kosicińska

also Shia. According to the general census from 2014, Sadakhlo was then populated by 7000 people.

The village is proud of its musicians, called ashugs, who sing songs in Azerbaijani accompanied by an instrument called saz. Other non-standard sounds pierce through the whirr of the cars – this is the dice of nardy, the most popular game here, also known as backgammon. The largest concentration of players is always found in chai khana, where the movement of the pawn is interrupted time and again by sips of hot tea. The largest chai khana in Sadakhlo is located in the building of the House of Culture, which inside is decorated with interesting stained-glass windows and paintings made of metal. Drivers can stop here before crossing the border into Armenia. Since 2020, the second border – the one with Azerbaijan – is closed to land traffic, which affects the daily lives of residents trading goods and wanting to see their family members on the other side of the border.

Moreover, the pandemic has shown that mobility is often the privilege of the wealthiest, which has reevaluated previous approaches and has changed local practices. However, when a random person takes a look at the products in the stores, do not see the detriment. It is full of food imported from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey. Only in nearby bakeries you might have a problem finding cheese and bean pies popular in Tbilisi – khachapuri and lobiani. Instead, a visitor will delve into other flavors, such as sweet or spicy gogal with turmeric filling, rolls with cinnamon and marmalade, or white creamy, obscenely sweet cakes. It is easy to find lula kebab or doner, shaurma in Georgian, popular when going to “dine out” alone or on the menu of families. But whether one eats sweet or salty, a common custom is to drink black, leafy tea – the most popular companies are Azerbaijan’s Azerçay and Mariam. You can drink it with lemon in chai khana or tea cafes, usually designed for men. Women mostly drink tea at home, brewing it in their

kitchens or while visiting each other. They often add to the tea muhe – which means in Azerbaijani “cloves” – or koklikotu – “thyme”. Every visitor to an Azerbaijani home will be able to try it. If there are no specially prepared local dishes, at least candies are always served with the tea. Depending on the wealth of the house, those might be chocolate candies, but most often plain caramels.

A seventy-year-old landlady from the village Dashtapa, close to Shulaveri, has yet another way of preparing sweets. She first dissolves sugar and coffee, adds walnuts, boils a stock of them, and then lets it cool overnight. The next day, a sugar taffy is ready. You only need to break it into smaller cubes with a hammer and serve it to your guests. I have not encountered such unique sugar anywhere outside her home, and it is definitely something my hostess is known for in the area.

The track man Huseyn at the train station building in Shulaveri (2022), by Klaudia Kosicińska

Old Soviet blocks in Shulaveri (2022), by Nutsa Lomsadze





A chaikhana in Marneuli Bazaar (2022), by Marie-Luise Schega

TRACING COMMON SPACES

*by Corten Perez-Houis, Kirill Repin, Sopiko Rostiashvili, Marie-Luise Schega
Hermine Virabian*

Every being leaves a trace. One does not even have to do anything, simply be in order to alter and be altered in interrelation with (an)other. The scale of trace-making skyrockets if we hone in on human existence in the age of anthropocentric climate change. Of course, that story is as complex as our species. We know our footprints are too large for this planet to survive. We also know that in order to survive, we need to be noticed and acknowledged by our fellow earth dwellers. Most of us want to be remembered, somehow, by someone.

During our visits to Marneuli Bazaar and Shulaveri village, both significant due to their co-existing Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, our group paid attention to physical, social, emotional and historical traces. The unspoken borders, relational stories, daily routines, smells and tastes. The present and the absent.

By being there, clearly visibly non-locals, we left traces ourselves. With the money we spent and the money we didn't spend, thanks to people's unwavering hospitality. Through the stories we exchanged and the stories we couldn't exchange due to language barriers. We observed and were being observed; we documented with our cameras, pens and papers, and were in turn subjects of local gossip. We became each other's memories.

Being an inherently complex species also means we are masters of oversimplification, especially when faced with temporal constraints. Our experience during the field school was no different. What we present here are selected representations of the traces we recorded and interpreted over the course of three days, according to our personal backgrounds, skills and interests.

A SMALL NOTE ON METHODOLOGICAL ABDUCTION

by Kirill Repin

How to capture unknown space without imposing an artificial matrix of superfluous boundaries and arbitrary divisions? The question of objectivity – uncomfortable in its own right – looms even larger, when posed for and by a group of foreigners, aiming to grasp a local context under the conditions of extreme time pressure, as in the case of the summer school.

With all the fieldwork squeezed into hours, that hardly exceed one full day in their entirety, the only refuge that seems to remain is epistemic humility – a humble acknowledgment that the space will inevitably elude our attempts to encompass it in its completeness. Thus, it is through emptiness that we decide to proceed, emptiness full of traces.

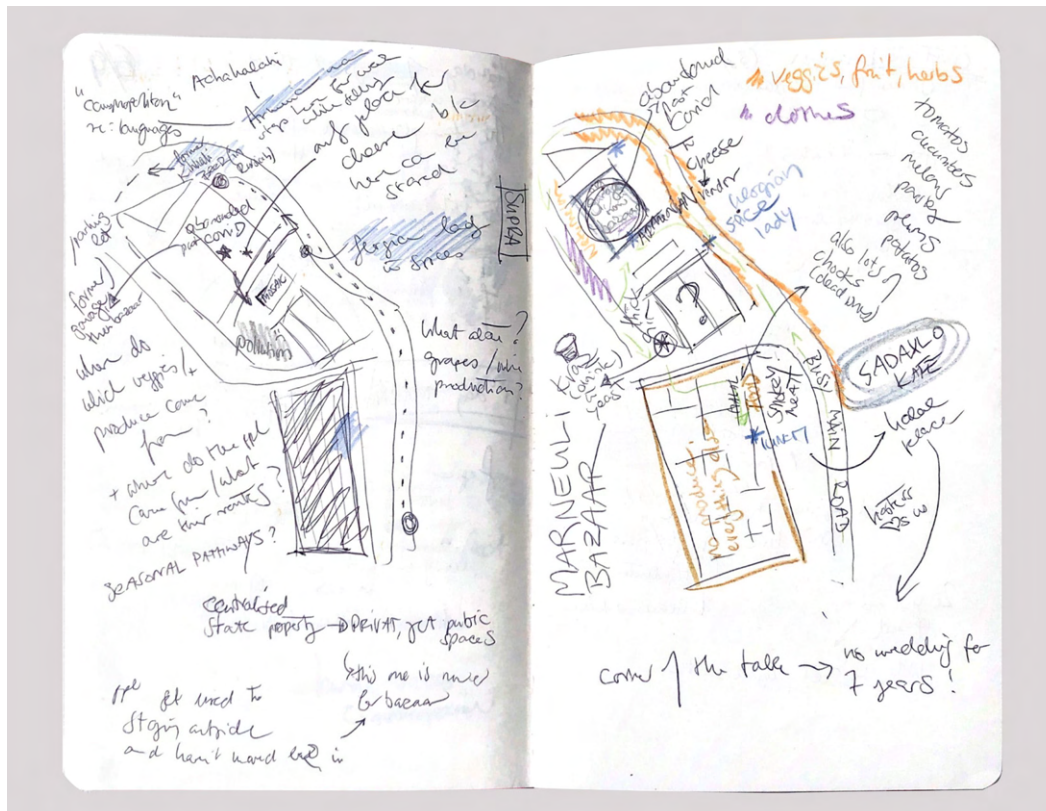
This task becomes clear in the haunting solitude of the main market hall

at Marneuli bazar. Built some 10-15 years ago to put all the vendors of local produce under one roof, it had to be vacated with the start of the pandemic in 2020 for the sake of health security, and now stands full of absence. Or rather, as it quickly starts to appear, filled with the presence of somebody's absence.

From here we slide along the crooked geometry of the market, following the logic of abduction – letting the space mesmerise us and lead us away from ourselves. We are looking for something we don't know – finding traces and letting traces find us. In a dizzying polyvocality, the space suddenly starts to expand beyond the boundaries of the Marneuli market and a trace becomes the lowest common denominator for this multidimensional geometry that reveals itself to us.

"Perhaps, this partial failure is simply part of it as a method– always leaving a chance of doubt..."

Sketched maps (2022), by Marie-Luise Schega



Hints turn into signs, as we encounter (or intrude?) stories spawn out of the webs of connections, relations, phrases and languages, products and objects, subjects and species, co-inhabiting this space in their simultaneity. We explore it in a vernacular way, relying on the stories we hear about how the common life in the past was easier than it is in the present. How the nearby countries, better-off economically, is a place to go, but eventually, also a place to return from. How the closure of borders during the pandemic has significantly shrunk the turnover off the market – the centre of local economic activity. How multilingualism and mutual respect are mundanely practised in the present – something that still makes this present somewhat easy to share.

Caught between vernacular phenomenology and phenomenology of the vernacular, we look, hear and disperse in different directions, in order to meet later together again in one of the market chaikhana's to share a common meal. We complete our own circle(s), contemplating how while looking for traces, we let the space leave traces in ourselves. In an enticing way our maps, notes and sketches, photos and video footage invite us to treat them as a window onto the explored space. Alas, they can equally be just a mirror of our own gazes.

Looking at it, we recognize how our trajectories got inevitably entwined into the spatial fabric we have been trying to disentangle. Its geometrical pattern now extends through us as well and we have become actors in this incessant multidimensional spatial poesis. Abduction doesn't seem to have worked out completely...

Perhaps, this partial failure is simply part of it as a method– always leaving a chance of doubt, a certain degree of emptiness to step back and reconsider one's own perspective, knowing that there is so much more to tell. Emptiness, that we have been trying to synchronise all along: in our improvised approach, in the space we have explored and within our own selves.

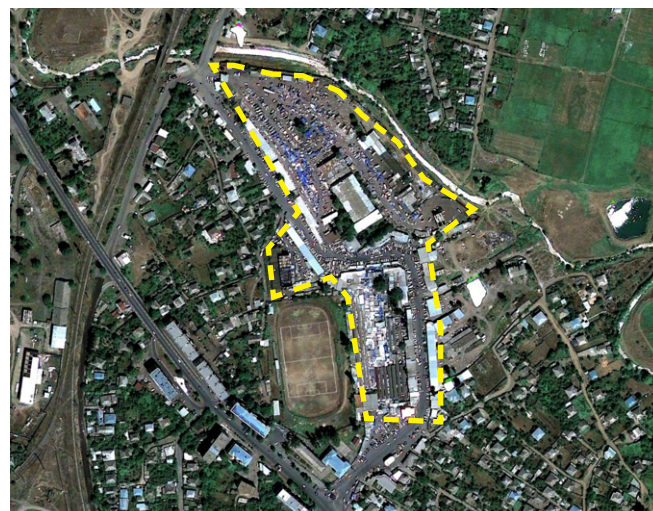


MAPPING A COMMON TRADING AREA

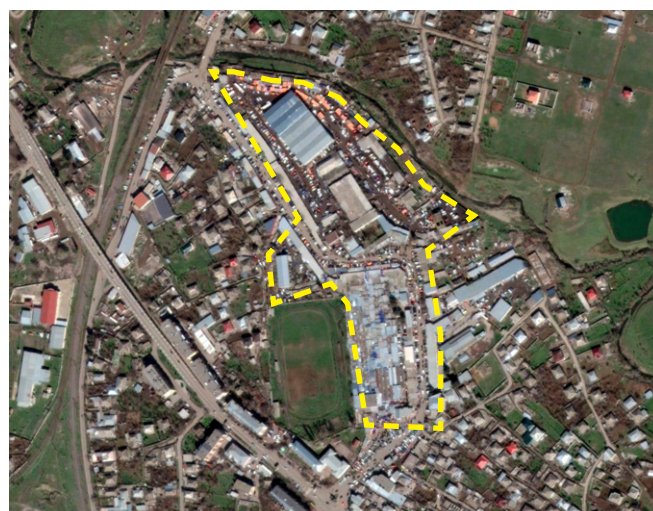
by Corten Perez-Houis

Marneuli Bazaar is an ancient regional trading hub for several products, such as vegetables, fruits and meat. It is constituted of different zones that can be defined by the architecture and organisation of the space (open air/ covered market), by the types of products sold (vegetables, dairy products, clothes) or by its history. The main open air area is surrounded by old garages, converted into warehouses and workshops after the collapse of the Soviet Union, whereas the Marneuli Mall, for example, is very recent (2017), as well as the massive covered market. It was built under Mikheil Saakashvili's rule (2012) to host the vegetable and dairy sellers, but has been abandoned since the beginning of the Covid pandemic in 2020.

We approached the spatial and commercial organisation and its recent evolutions through mapping. Each person's mapping took a different form - manual sketches, satellite images, computer-aided design - and happened at different intervals - during an interview, between two field visits, two weeks after our visits. The mapping gestures were often automatic, which can be explained by the different backgrounds of the participants, but also as a way to directly translate our visual observations on paper. These maps are the products of our observations, our perceptions of the place and our memories. Far from only trying to give an exact snapshot of the « reality » of Marneuli bazaar, they show our different approaches to this trading area and the traces that left a mark on us.



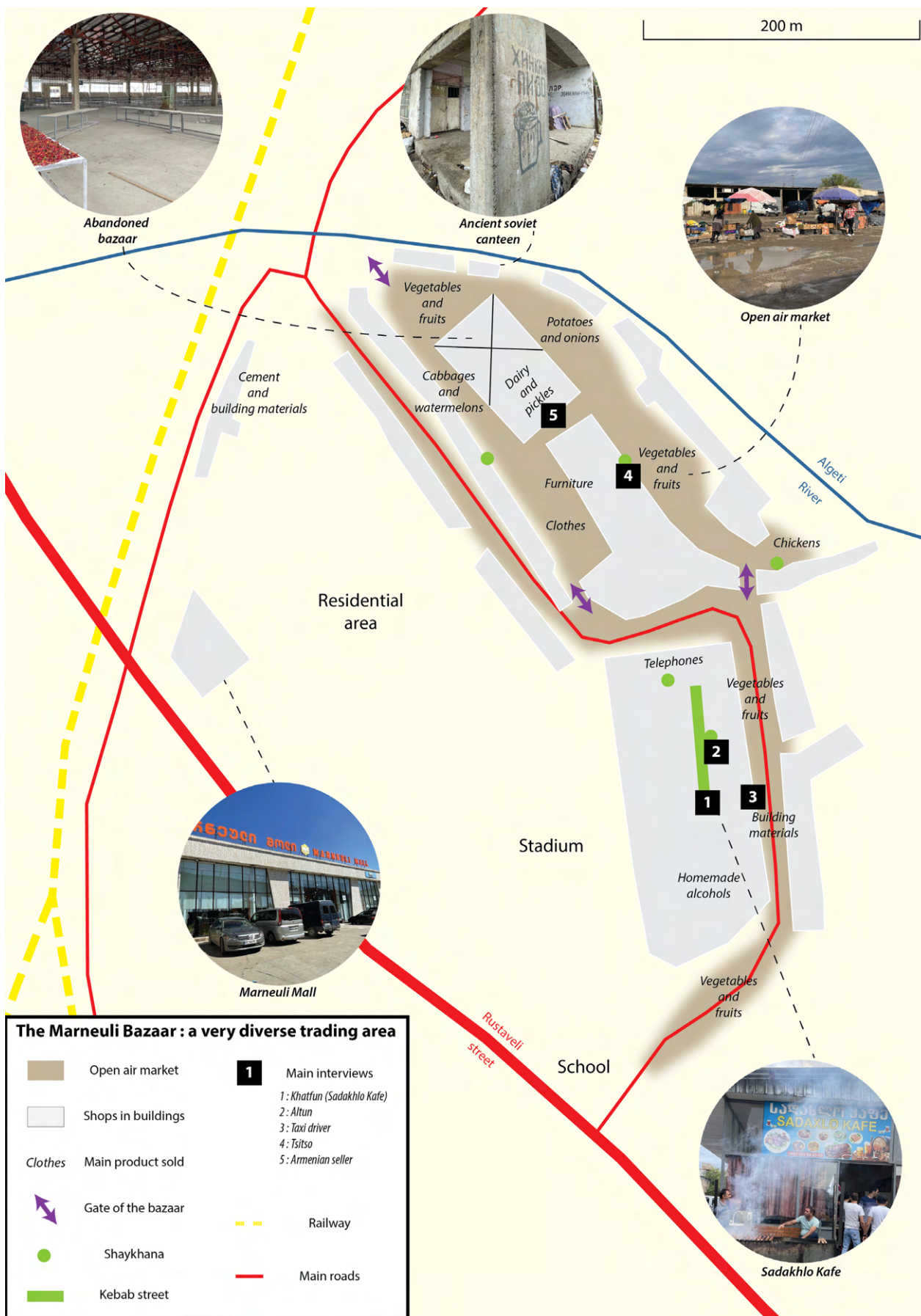
2009



2016



2022





HIDING AND SAVING:

by Sopiko Rostiashvili

Marneuli is a city in the Kvemo Kartli region, close to Tbilisi. Compared to the capital, however, it is significantly peripheral culturally, socially, politically, and urbanely. The perceived remoteness of the place and the non-material boundaries through which it is often defined, are conditioned, on the one hand, by the demographic structure of the local population: Marneuli is mainly populated by ethnic and religious minorities. On the other hand, despite representing an important economic region in Georgia, which supplies the whole country with agricultural goods, many of its inhabitants live in poverty and are exposed to strong social inequality. The symbolic distance between Marneuli and the Georgian capital thus seems farther than the geographical one.

Marneuli Bazaar is one of the most significant shared spaces of function and diversity. It is an important commercial center on the local, national, and international levels. This bazaar supplies the city

and the rest of the country with agricultural goods. It creates space for product exchange between Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan connecting the three countries via a common food trade system. Hence, the space is very sensitive to changes. It reacts to policies and transformations in this borderland region. For example, academic research and sellers at the Marneuli Bazaar corroborate how the area is negatively affected by the COVID-related restrictions of cross-border movements. In some cases, the trading supply chain between these countries was simply lost.

The Marneuli bazaar is located in the city centre and covers a significant area. It includes a substantial bounded commercial space and the road which connects it to Rustaveli Street – the main street in Marneuli. This conjunctive road is voluntarily occupied by vendors. Most of the sales

people here are Azerbaijanian villagers from the Marneuli region who sell goods from cars and minibuses on sidewalks. But you can find Kartlelian, Svani, or Armenian vendors, too. Indeed, the owner of the main commercial space is a Svani businessman.

The bazaar is divided by its varied assortments: agricultural goods, meat, cheese, first-hand and second-hand clothes, and shoes. Kabab houses and Chai-khanas are popular meeting places. All these products and services can be found in specific areas of the bazaar. Invisible boundaries sharply separate these functional spaces. Indeed, they do not cross over or mix with each other.

At the beginning of the bazaar, you can find the main bazaar, as locals call it, where clothes and meat are sold, and

kabab houses and chai-khanas are located. People sell agricultural goods around this main bazaar space but not inside. The neighboring part is given to agricultural products and other small things.

A new market hall has been abandoned since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, with the vendors moving out to the surrounding area. Interviews with some of them revealed why they prefer that way instead of moving back into the market hall: selling products outside is better because of fewer taxes and the lower possibility of spreading COVID.

Saving and hiding in Marneuli Bazaar

What does hiding or saving mean? And what is the difference between them? In this article, I define hiding as an act of making undesirable, shameful things invisible. Saving refers to temporarily storing valuable items for future consumption inconspicuously. In different contexts, these terms may be explained differently and have distinct meanings. From my perspective and within the context of our

“The symbolic distance between Marneuli and the Georgian capital thus seems farther than the geographical one.”

field work, these terms accurately capture the practices that can often be observed among the people in the Marneuli bazaar. Chaos and lack of organization are some of the first impressions while visiting the Marneuli bazaar. A considerable amount of trash attracted my attention. However, as I was exploring the space, I discovered that the existing chaos is indeed organized, and people who work there have their own strategies for dealing with trash. The example of the Marneuli bazaar shows that waste, as a specific object of shame and often a marker of social inequality and marginalisation, can result in the intention of making it “disappear,” i.e., dissolve into the background. Working in the field in Marneuli brought new patterns of using space into light. The administration's and workers' attitudes toward trash are apparent in a partly unseen way. From the city center to the main bazaar part, it is evident that the daily accumulated waste is cleaned up in an everyday routine.

Nevertheless, in the agricultural market, one can immediately recognize how rubbish gets accumulated over a long period of time. In this case, people start collecting waste following a specific pattern, conveying an attempt to hide it in an (in)conspicuous way. At the Marneuli bazaar, it is common for vendors to gather rotten vegetables, fruits, and other waste, accumulating them under trees, bushes, or walls of nearby buildings. As mentioned earlier, it seems that the approach makes accumulated trash as an annoying or unpleasant condition invisible. At first glance, there might even be a feeling that the waste is produced and owned by a plant or a location, not by vendors and their clients.

Hence, another question is raised: Why don't these vendors clean up the rubbish by themselves? It isn't possible to fully answer this question with the limited collected materials during our field work. It can only be speculated that, because this bazaar is a private place, local vendors

don't have a feeling of ownership over the space, which would perhaps motivate them to clean it.

Moreover, there is another hiding practice at Marneuli bazaar. Some vendors try to hide and make waste invisible by storing it behind their shop counters. In this case, the trash cannot be seen from the front, but only from the back.

Besides what is shameful and should be hidden, there are practices no less significant, like the practice of saving. Vanishing is a saving attempt, too, which vendors and customers implement at the same time.

During one of the days we visited the Marneuli bazaar, it was rainy and thus less favorable weather for local salespeople. That day, the practice of saving goods was particularly apparent. Local vendors of agricultural goods wrap their products in fabrics or, in the best case, a waterproof canvas. Sometimes one can also find

things wrapped in curtains or even clothes, although this is a poor decision as it provides limited protection from the elements.

Customers have saving practices, too. During our exploration of the abandoned market hall, my colleagues and I found a wooden sheet attached to a table next to the wall. Behind this sheet, someone had saved the goods purchased at the bazaar. Although it wasn't noticeable from the front, from the side we could see that someone stored the products there for a purpose. Interestingly, we didn't see this stuff and the wooden sheet when we returned the next day.

In summary, the article explores the structure of the bazaar and shared practices of saving and hiding among vendors and customers at Marneuli Bazaar. First, the bazaar is a core economic and common space with clearly detached areas, if via invisible boundaries. Second, the hierarchy inside the bazaar impacts how waste management and people function (especially where vendors of agricultural goods are located on the

“Everyday practices of saving and hiding in this bazaar illustrate the following context: the prevalence of inequality.”



Covered bazaar stands in Marneuli Bazaar (2022), by Sopiko Rostiashvili

streets surrounding the abandoned market). Two of the explored within these structures are saving and hiding.

Everyday practices of saving and hiding in this bazaar illustrate the following context: the prevalence of inequality. The local administration does not collect all the waste, which, over time, accumulates. This may be the reason why vendors started hiding practices. Moreover, inhabitants' attitudes toward trash and the shame of co-existing with waste are apparent in the hiding practices within the context of the bazaar. These are primordial and naive practices, as much as the saving of goods for future consumption, which remain visible and are not protected properly. Finally, in Marneuli Bazaar everyday practices of hiding and saving are collectively shared and firmly established.

A FEAST FOR THE EYES

photographed by Marie-Luise Schega (35mm film)

Visual traces of the raw, fresh, dried, growing, grown, harvested, forgotten, processed, prepared, packaged, consumed, decorative, surviving, discarded, mouldy, rotting, decomposing foods we encountered in Shulaveri and at Marneuli Bazaar.

Tittles of photographs in the following pages:

- P.22 Herbs for sale at Marneuli Bazaar, (2022)*
- P.23 Vegetable vendor at Marneuli Bazaar (2022)*
- P.24 Squash decor in private backyard near Shulaveri (2022)*
- P.25 Pomegranates at abandoned sites in Shulaveri (2022)*
- P.25 Cafe waitress at Marneuli Bazaar (2022)*











NATURE ONE
YOU ARE STAR

“YOURS, SPACE”

Poem by Marie-Luise Schega & Film Stills by Hermine Virabian

The poem “yours, space” was translated into Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian, and displayed in all four languages at the exhibition in Tbilisi. The translators, three women, also recorded the poem in their respective languages, providing the narration for the short film “boundaries of space, traced” by Hermine Virabian. Hermine and I collected the impressions that resulted in the poetic short film during our visits to the village Shulaveri and the main city bazaar in Marneuli. We are thankful to those who shared these snippets of their daily lives and consented to our recordings.

a star, a cross, a line drawn in the dirt
yet you forgo your godly gestures,
enter me without permission,
question my existence at the threshold:
who owns me. what I was used for.
why I was abandoned to time.

and you, where do you belong?

inside me, your fingers trace
relics of the commons,
dust and debris, a yellow plastic bag
feigning stillness next to rotting
flesh of figs, mandarins, cucumbers,
seasons discarded, not forgotten

and then, why did you leave me?

to survive, and I don't blame you
for seeking refuge in the streets,
oscillating between wafts of meat and bitter chai
the familiar flavors of indiscernible neighbors
muted boundaries more comforting
than my emptiness

and now, do you co-exist?

or co-exit past and future
co-abandoned by war and peace
you tell your children not to pick at the scabs
but what is more tempting than pulling back the layers,
forfeiting innocence to scars as cosmic
as the cracks in my foundation

and later, will you remember?

gifting candy when you “won” and they “lost”,
you “lost”, they “won”, we lost, we all lost —
there will always be conflict here, I'm told
and always drink to peace
hoping there's hope
even when the lights turn off

chapter I

trace (noun)

a mark, object,
or other indication
of the existence
or passing of something

a very small quantity,
especially one too small to be accurately measured



yet you forgo your godly gestures



question my existence at the threshold



and you



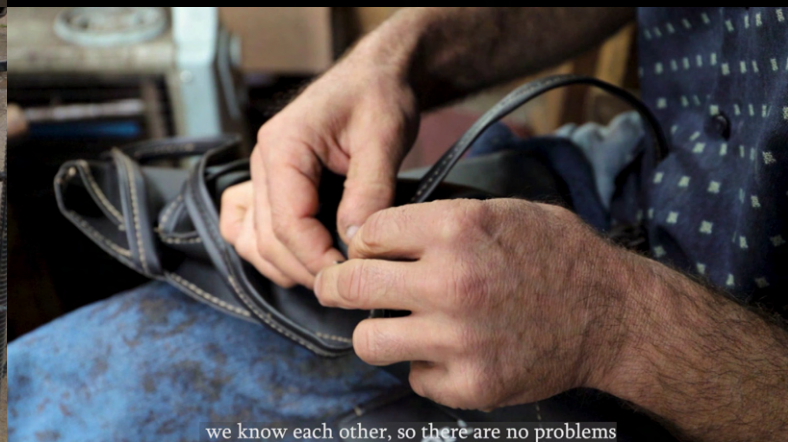
relics of the commons



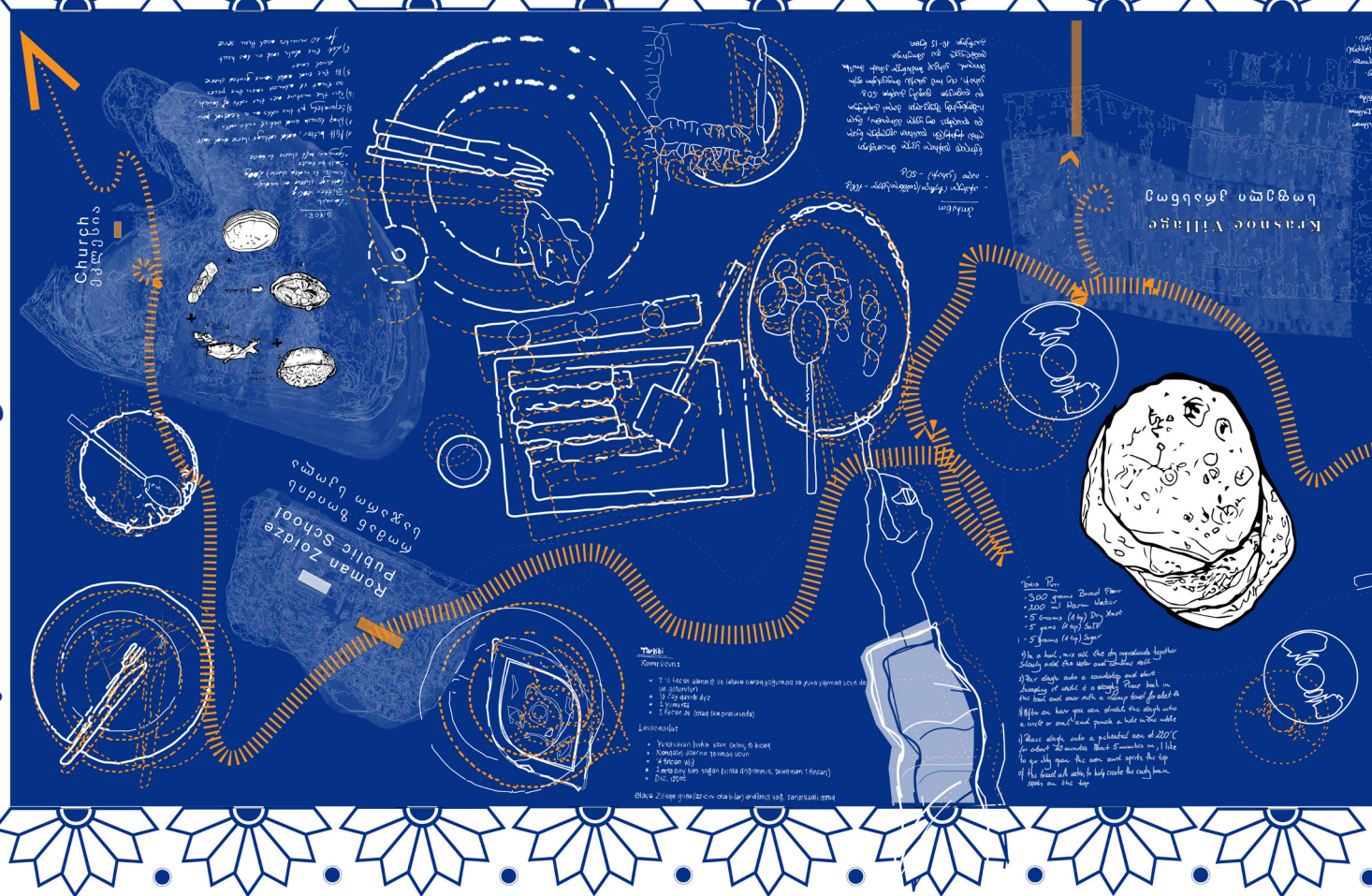
than my emptiness



and now, do you co-exist?



we know each other, so there are no problems



Illustrations by Katya Krat, Photos by Nutsa Lomsadze & Katya Krat

SUPRA OF STORIES

by Jan Chrzan, Katya Krat & Nutsa Lomsadze

Guests in the hinterlands

Walking the landscape of the Georgian hinterlands meant exploring various boundaries between host and guest. A friendly dog would start to bark, and suddenly a spontaneous supra (Georgian feast) begins over brewing coffee. At this moment, strangers become friends.

As we traversed this journey, sounds of life surrounded streets, shops and markets. Houses and garden gates opened to reveal origins, dreams and stories of common grounds through a unique amalgamation of Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani cuisine. In this hinterland of Georgia, the spoken languages are intertwined with the country's soviet history and vision of the future. Some of our fellow

field researchers could not communicate verbally with our hosts, so the act of making and consuming food or drink, often using our hands, became our common language.

The hosts of Shulaveri and its surrounding villages shared with us not only a meal but their experiences of family life, love and loss. We heard stories about the life of a thriving factory in soviet times and about the bond between Armenian and Azerbaijani neighbours. We traced our movements across these trails to form a palimpsest of encounters which celebrate these memories through a supra of stories. This supra of stories documents only a small segment of our journey through the site. Thus, the installation aims to honour our experiences with the people we met,



the food we ate and the knowledge we gained. In turn, this installation invites others after us to explore common ground and connection through food by laying down this tablecloth to inspire their own supra - expanding the supra of stories.

Tablecloth as Dialogue

In Georgia, a Supra (Georgian: სუფრა) is a traditional feast and an essential part of social culture. The event of a Supra brings people together through an array of dishes and toasts conducted by the Tamada, the duly appointed toastmaster. There are two types of supra: a festive supra (ღვინის სუფრა), called a keipi, and a sombre supra (ჭირის სუფრა), called a kelekhi, that is held after burials.

During our field research at the site of Shulaveri, and its surrounding areas we were invited into many people's homes and sat around many tables together. As a result, we want to frame the reflection of our experiences as a 'series of supras'.

To us, the supra of stories relates directly to its linguistic origins, the tablecloth. This tablecloth then threads together a common narrative of this place and its diverse people through the act of eating, making and connecting over time despite differences in language, culture, religion and age.

Each element of our final work is symbolic of our expressions of Shulaveri, Dashtapa and the Krasnoe Village and its inhabitants. Each drawing, pattern and motif is inspired by its resident's sense of place to celebrate their unique stories and hospitality. The supra of stories table cloth showcases the temporality of a multi-ethnic feast through lines of movement depicted in orange. Another line of movement divides and connects the cloth, and traces our walking journey, moving from region to region to document our experiences from a first-person and aerial perspective. Hand-written recipes in English, Armenian, Azerbaijani and

Georgian capture inhabitants' connection with food and each other, in spite of social or political boundaries.

Walking the Landscape

French philosopher Merleau-Ponty declared that the body constitutes a way to relate, perceive and understand the world. This phenomenological viewpoint suggests that the subject and the world are interlaced to form one. So places like these can act as a site which provides a rootedness to space and a connection to time, embodying both personal perception, memory and action through bodily understanding.

Hence, we saw Shulaveri, Dashtapa and the Krasnoe Village as situated networks of relationships and associations existing in space and time. Our methodology explored the idea of 'walking the landscape' to experience and embody the place through our senses. The smells, sounds and actions of each experience between host and guest highlighted its physical value and symbolic importance. This notion emphasizes the relationship between food and society, marking this place as a reflection of cultural significance within the context of Georgia.

Our journey through this site allowed us to enter unique microcosms of intertwined cultures. When walking Shulaveri we ventured to Dashtapa, an area mostly inhabited by Azerbaijani residents. Another route took us to the Red Village, a predominantly Armenian area, where Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian are spoken interchangeably. Indeed, we found these areas to be a melting pot of Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani cultures. We experienced and celebrated each cultural thread that our hosts revealed to us, allowing us to embrace both our differences and commonalities.

Armenian Coffee

Ingredients:

- Ground coffee
- Sugar
- Milk

Preparation:

1. Measure 1 (slightly heaped) teaspoon of coffee and place in the jazve.
2. If using sugar, measure desired amount and add to the jazve.
3. Using the espresso cup, measure one cup of cold tap water and add to the jazve.
4. Place the jazve on the stove top on low heat. Stir to make sure all ingredients combine well and remove the spoon.
5. Let the coffee rise but do not let it boil over. Remove from heat and enjoy!





Tonis Puri

Ingredients:

- 300 g. Flour
- 200 ml. Warm water
- 5 g. (1 tsp) Dry yeast
- 5 g. (1 tsp) Salt
- 5 g. (1 tsp) Sugar

Preparation:

1. In a bowl, mix all the dry ingredients together. Slowly add the water and combine well.
2. Pour dough onto a countertop and start kneading it until it is doughy. Place back in the bowl and cover with a damp towel for about 1 h.
3. After an hour you can stretch the dough into a circle or oval and punch a hole in the middle.
4. Place the dough into a preheated oven at 220 degrees for about 10 minutes. About 5 minutes in, quickly open the oven and spritz the top of the bread with water, to help creating the crusty brown spots on the top.

Dashtapa

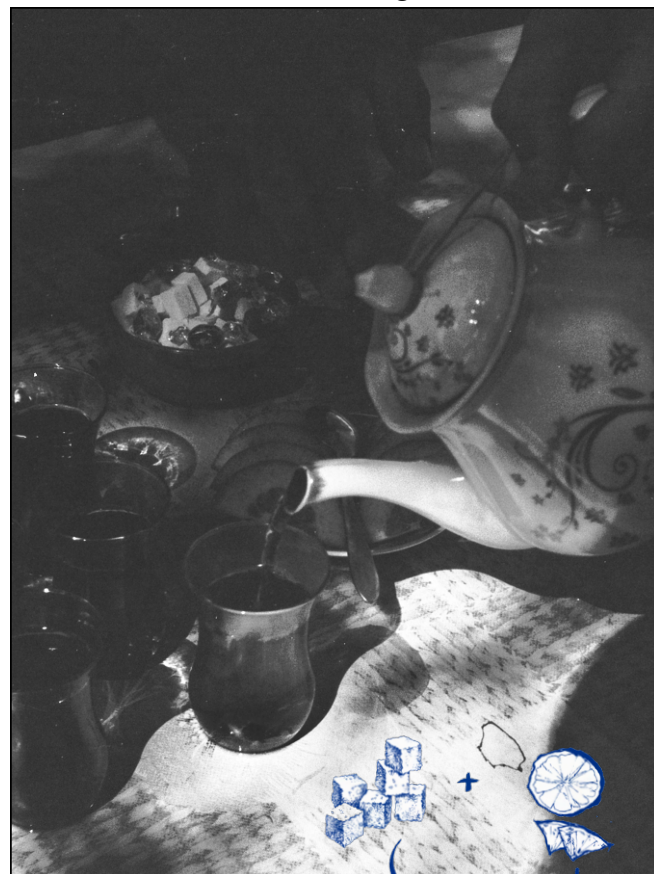
(Traditional fig preserve with chai)

Ingredients:

- 1 kg. green figs
- 700 g. sugar
- 1 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon rosewater

Preparation:

1. Wash the figs in cold water and let them dry completely.
2. Pour sugar and water into a large pot and put it on heat until it boils, then add the figs to this juice.
3. Let the jam boil for about 20 to 30 minutes on low heat and the figs soften, add rosewater and lemon juice.
4. Boil for another 5 minutes, then remove from the heat, pour into a glass jar, and let it cool. Store it in the refrigerator.



Pkhali with garden produce

(Krasnoe Village)

Ingredients:

- 300 g. (10 cups) fresh spinach
- 50 g. (1/3 cup) walnut halves
- 2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 25 g. (1/4 cup) fresh cilantro, chopped
- 2 teaspoons white wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon blue fenugreek
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 50 ml. (1/4 cup) sunflower (or any other neutral) oil
- Salt and pepper
- Pomegranate seeds, for garnish

Preparation:

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add spinach, stir and cook for one minute. Set aside.
2. In the bowl combine the walnuts and garlic until ground fine then add the spinach and cilantro. Pulse until well-combined and homogenous.
3. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and add vinegar, coriander, blue fenugreek, cayenne and oil, stir to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste. Cover with plastic and refrigerate mixture until it is firm, about one hour.
4. With clean hands, shape the pkhali into small balls, 4-6 in total depending on the size you prefer. Garnish with pomegranate seeds, serve and enjoy!

Sinori (An Adjarian Supra)

Ingredients:

- Lavash
- Butter 100 g.
- Cottage cheese or naduglu (similar to ricotta cheese) 200 g.
- Salt to taste
- Georgian soft cheese to taste

Preparation:

1. Melt the butter, add cottage cheese and salt.
2. Wrap lavash and cut it into rolls and cut it into rolls.
3. Separately put the rolls on a heated pan.
4. Pour the mixture over the rolls of lavash, so that it almost covers the pieces.
5. At the end add some grated cheese and cover.
6. Let the dish cook on low heat for 10 minutes and then serve.

Tastes of Borano

(An Adjarian Supra)

Ingredients:

- 100 g Braided Adjarian cheese
- 50 g Butter

Preperation:

1. Cut the butter and melt in a pot on high heat till melted.
2. Pull the cheese apart and add to pot.
3. Stir till the cheese is cooked in melted butter in a pot.
4. Serve with with Georgian bread shoti or mchadi (flat cake of corn), a light salad of cucumbers and tomatoes.





Yarpakh Hengel

(An Azerbaijani Lunch)

Ingredients:

Dough :

- 2 ½ cups sifted flour (extra flour for kneading and rolling)
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- 1 egg
- 1 cup water (room temperature)

Filling:

- ¼ cup oil
- Salt, pepper:
- Melted butter, yogurt and garlic

Preparation:

1. Mix the eggs, water and salt in a large bowl.
2. Gradually add the flour and make a dough that is not very soft.
3. We knead the dough then start by making a roll & divide it into four parts.
4. Cover it with a damp cloth and let it rest for 15 minutes.

5. Roll out dough balls while adding flour gradually.

6. Cut strips with a width of 1 and a half fingers and then cut into squares.

7. Sprinkle flour and shake the tray lightly. Thus, we prevent the dough from sticking together by mixing it with flour then let it rest.

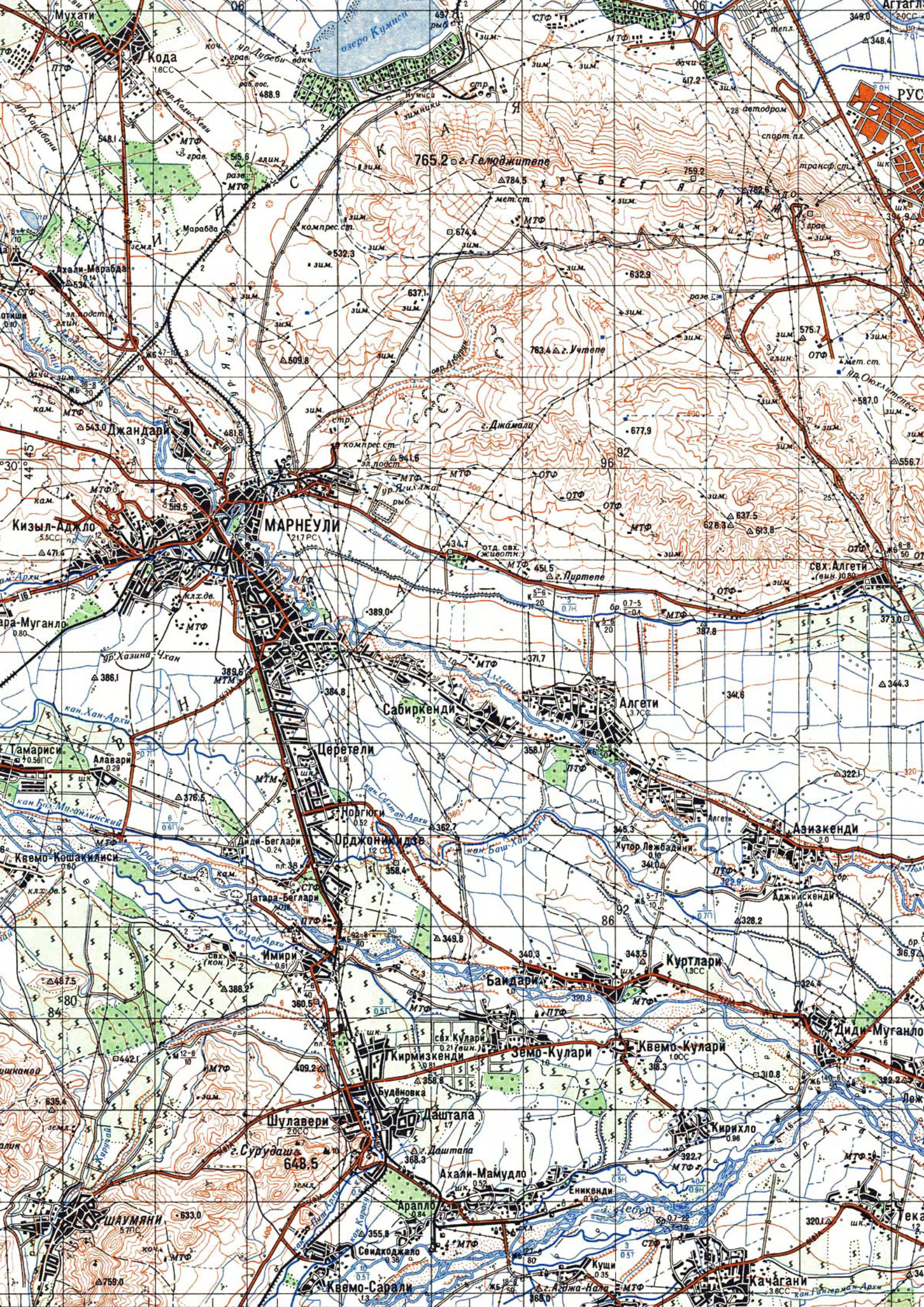
8. Boil water in a large saucepan and add a few drops of oil and some salt to it.

9. Throw the dough and boil it like boiling pasta without melting it too much and then strain it. Run some cold water over it and let it drain well.

10. Without waiting too long, we mix our strained dough with yogurt sauce in a deep bowl.

11. We take it on a serving plate and fry the garlic with butter and drizzle on it.







Sunset in Shulaveri (2022), by Marie-Luise Schega

SHULAVERI

by Natavan Alieva

It was a sunny but chilly morning. We were driving to Shulaveri village from Tserakvi village. Shulaveri is a village located in the South of Marneuli municipality of the Kvemo Kartli region in the southeastern part of Georgia, near the border with Azerbaijan and Armenia. The village is mostly known as an old and historical village. It is considered to be the homeland of Shulaveri-Shomu culture, one of the earliest known Neolithic cultures, which dates back to the mid 6th or early 5th millennium BC.

This was our first visit to the village. The main purpose of our visit was to research the common areas for the population of the village. According to the 2014 census, the population of Shulaveri was 1551 people, of which 49% were Azerbaijanis, 31% Georgians and 17% Armenians. Thus, diversity is the main characteristic of the population of Shulaveri.

We were all very excited since we did not know the village and could not predict the reaction of the locals. Our minibus

dropped us off in the center of Shulaveri, which was crowded and noisy due to supermarkets, hairdressers, bakeries and chaikhanas (from “chai” meaning tea, and “khana” — room). However, I must emphasize that we were most impressed by the hill of the village even before we reached the center. The hill is called Shulaveri Hill, also known as “Surudashi” (from “suru” meaning sharp, and “dashi” stone) among the locals. The hill is visible from every corner of the village and left me with the impression of the Eiffel Tower of Shulaveri. In fact, the hills are considered to represent wilderness, freedom, or the border between civilizations, but I think that Shulaveri Hill can be called a common space for the villagers because of the historical traces of their ancestors.

We started walking along the road. We felt the glances of local residents on us, as they realized that we were strangers to the village. Passing the bakery along the road and noticing the smell of bread coming from

there, it was impossible not to slow down. The bakery was owned by an Azerbaijani villager who worked there with his wife. They invited us to try their freshly baked bread, which was called Shoti, traditional Georgian bread. We couldn't refuse them. I still remember the amazing taste of this bread. Their warm attitude was a genuine sign of the hospitality of the villagers and slightly reduced our nervousness.

After walking for some time, we noticed an unused transport wagon, which later directed us to the Shulaveri railway station. The former name of the station was Ashaga Seral and various stories are associated with it. According to one of the employees of the station, during the Silk Road, a hotel was located at the present site of the train station, where travelers (caravaners) could rest. The railway station is also known as a historic battlefield because of the Battle of Imiri (Emir) that took place there during the German military operations in Southern Georgia on June 8, 1918. Some historians even claim that two German soldiers who died during the battle were buried near the station. Currently, the station does not serve passengers. It was closed with the onset of the global pandemic situation in the country and has not been reopened. Before the closure, it was the main and cheapest transport route for the villagers, especially for merchants trading in Sadakhlo and Marneuli. Today, the main occupation of the population of the village is trade. Trade has become the main source of the village economy, especially after the destruction of a woolen factory.

During the Soviet Union, Marneuli Municipality was one of the main economic regions of Georgia. Among the key industries was a woolen factory located in Shulaveri. The factory is considered a common space because it brought together thousands of local and regional workers who contributed to the economic development of the village.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, as in other villages of the Marneuli municipality, led to the destruction of the factory in Shulaveri. This caused a sharp increase in poverty, unemployment and migration to cities and abroad among residents of the village. Currently, you can only find the remains of a factory in an abandoned area full of garbage. However, walking among these remains takes you back to the 90s.

The railway station left me with two impressions. Firstly, I saw it as a common space for the villagers before its closure, where dozens of people from different communities of the village traveled together every day. Secondly, it led to a split among the residents of the village.

The railway station seemed to me to be the Kura of Shulaveri, dividing it into two parts, one part leading to a landscape mainly inhabited by Azerbaijanis, and the other by Armenians.

During our two-day visit to Shulaveri, we had the opportunity to visit families from every community (Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani) in the village.

The Georgian family we were able to visit was originally from Adjara. In 1989, after landslides in the villages of Adjara, about sixty Georgian families were resettled in Shulaveri.

These family visits helped us to understand the several main commonalities that exist between the multicultural community of the village: unity, hospitality and uniqueness.

Language is considered an expression of unity or diversity. In Shulaveri, it is mainly unity, since most of the villagers can speak the language of another community, which, in turn, comes from long-standing friendships, good neighborliness and friendly cooperation. Shulaveri can be considered the best example of interethnic peace in the South Caucasus, especially among Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

Hospitality is another common feature of Shulaveri residents. Whatever door you knock on in the village, be it

"Language is considered an expression of unity or diversity. In Shulaveri, it is mainly unity, since most of the villagers can speak the language of another community, which, in turn, comes from long-standing friendships, good neighborliness and friendly cooperation."

Azerbaijani, Georgian or Armenian, be sure you will be greeted with full of warmth and love.

The family visits also showed us that despite the fact that the inhabitants of the village share common areas, each community has been able to create its own landscape and preserve its own cultural uniqueness, such as religion, traditional norms, values, cuisine, festivals or holidays. Therefore, Shulaveri reminds me of a sandwich culture. In sociology, sandwich culture is defined as the culture of migrants living in a new place where they retain their traditional and cultural values. But it must be emphasized that in the landscape of every community of the village one can still find a very small common tradition that binds them together: grapevines. After all, archaeologists found the oldest wine vessel in Shulaveri, confirming a long lasting tradition of wine production in the village.

Surdash Mountain (2022), by Nutsa Lomsadze



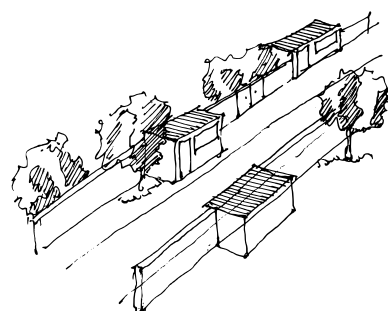


Illustrations and Photos by Lala Iskandarli

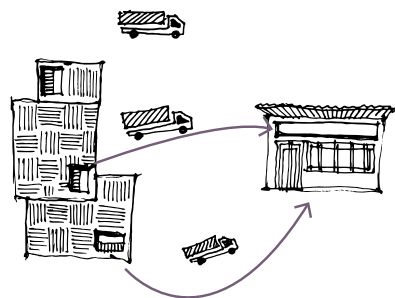
STORIES OF KIOSKS (PAST AND PRESENT OF SHAUMIANI) by Ketevan Lapachi & Lala Iskandarli

The work is the result of the summer school Researching Common Territories, which took place in the beginning of September in Marneuli, Kvemo Kartli, Georgia. It focused on Shaumiani, a village in Marneuli Municipality entirely inhabited by Armenians, with the exception of the former military town, where Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Tskhinvali region live. Until 1925, Shaumiani was called Shulaveri, but because of changing the political system in the country, i.e. the formation of Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1921 (Jones, 1988, 616), it was renamed after Bolshevik revolutionary Stepan Shahumyan. Shaumiani was quite a big and important settlement during the Russian Empire and Soviet times. In 2014, however, it lost the status of daba (small town) and became a village. At that time, its population consisted of 3107 persons¹.

¹ Statistical Yearbook of Georgia, National Statistics Office of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2014. p.38, https://www.geostat.ge/media/20935/Yearbook_2014.pdf, (accessed, 29.10.2022).



THE REAPPEARING TENDENCY AND LACK OF DEMAND OF ABANDONED KIOSKS



as locals say,
DURING SOVIET TIMES MOST GOODS
WERE SOLD IN SMALL SHOPS AND KIOSKS



While walking along the main road in the so-called Armenian part of Shaumiani, we encountered a significant number of abandoned kiosks. The reappearing frequency of the kiosks and their lack of operations was something that truly caught our attention and brought us to the main theme of our research: self-sufficiency of the village during Soviet times and its present dependency.

The kiosks might be considered an infrastructure of the village that created the space and possibility for locals to exchange ideas and goods (Larkin, 2013, 328). An infrastructure itself is characterized by temporality and often perceived as an invisible background (Edwards, 2003, 191) that might become visible just after its disappearance. This may be partially true for Shaumiani since the kiosks drew our attention precisely because of their non-functionality. They seemed to have fallen out of space and time and no longer belonged to Shaumiani's modernity.

This research is based on non-participant observation and the interviews conducted with locals with the help of our translator, Vani Aslikyan. The shared stories and memories about kiosks acted as channels towards a broader understanding of past and present of Shaumiani.

As locals told us, during Soviet times most of the consumer goods were being sold in different small shops or kiosks located along the main road of the village. There were kiosks for meat, fish, pastry, alcohol and most of them were selling an array of products, not only certain types of goods.

Back then, Shaumiani also had grape growing Sovkhoz. In fact, grape growing was one of the leading undertakings of the Sovkhoz in the Georgian SSR². Sovkhoz was a form of enterprise in the USSR that implemented private-in-the-collective economic principles (Konstantinov, 2007, 4). Workers of the Sovkhoz were paid

wages, but they might have also cultivated personal garden plots (Ibid).

During our time in Shaumiani, inhabitants of the village mentioned that it was local residents who used to supply kiosks with meat, vegetables, fruits and some of the alcoholic drinks, thanks to the existence of the Shaumiani Sovkhoz. There were three butcher shops in Shaumiani and if a butcher wanted to buy meat, he would go to one of the residents of the village who had an animal farm. In fact, goods produced in the village were often consumed locally. However, nowadays Shaumiani is dependent on Marneuli and other big settlements around it. Local shop owners or residents themselves go to Marneuli or Tbilisi, sometimes even to Kakheti to buy products for everyday use, and many of the goods are imported from Russia.

Hence, kiosks have lost their original infrastructural significance and under consumer-focused capitalism, people in Shaumiani have less access to goods locally. The loss of locally produced and sold goods could be a reason for Shaumiani's ever decreasing

population since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Further, the history of kiosks in Shaumiani challenges the wide-spread notion that living under socialism meant living with a shortage of products. Today, theoretically, inhabitants of Shaumiani can buy anything from any part of the world. In reality, however, they have less access to goods locally than they did in Soviet times.

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² Kakhniashvili J. *Georgian Soviet encyclopedia*, Vol 8, p. 582.



kiosk on the map

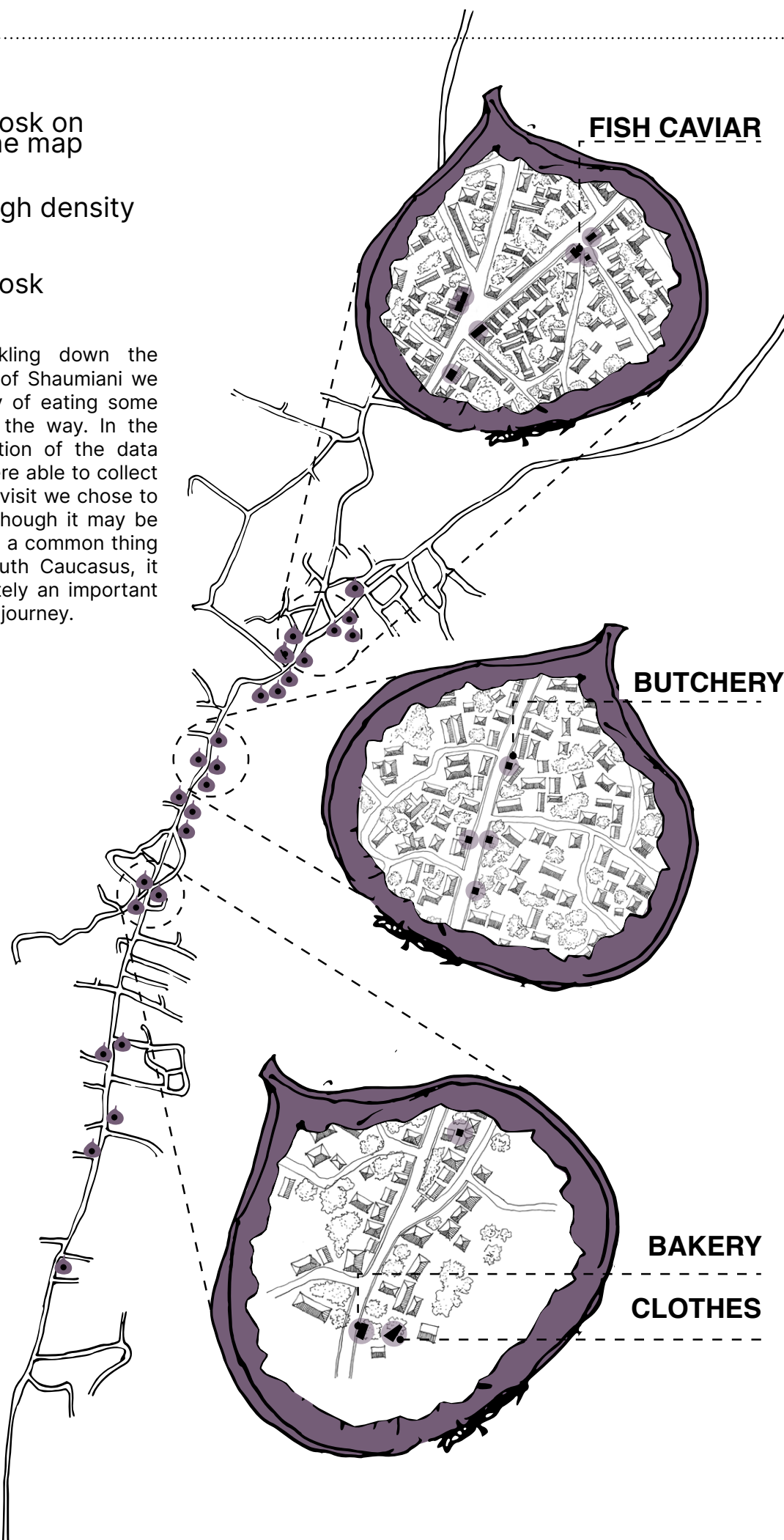


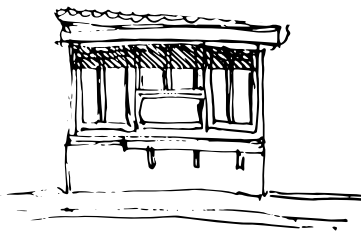
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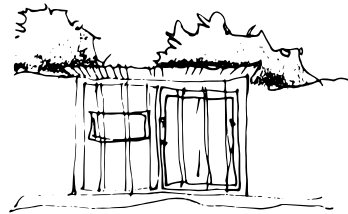
kiosk

While walking down the main road of Shaumiani we were guilty of eating some figs along the way. In the representation of the data that we were able to collect during our visit we chose to use figs. Though it may be considered a common thing for the South Caucasus, it was definitely an important part of our journey.

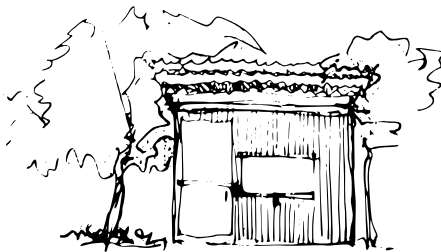




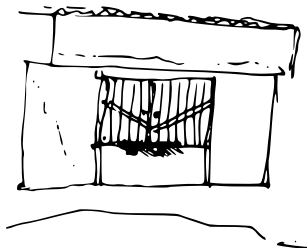
A variety of products, including vodka and beer, were being sold in this kiosk during the Soviet Union.



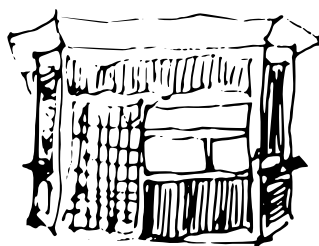
Originally built as a garage, the kiosk was used by the owner to sell cigarettes and coffee to sustain himself during the collapse of Soviet Union.



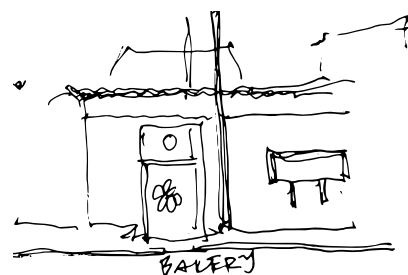
Butchery shop during the Soviet times. Meat was supplied by local peasants, so it was produced and consumed locally.



The kiosk was owned by the local Savkhoz. One could buy fish, caviar, vegetables and locally produces sausages.



The kiosk did not differ much from the others in terms of its function, although it had a relatively distinctive architecture.



A Tone (traditional georgian bakery)in the 1990s.



Film Stills by Maya Perusin Mysorekar

THE LIBRARY OF SHAUMIANI

by Juri Wasenmüller

We learn about the library from a group of men sitting at a long table in front of the village's former Dom Kultury. The clacking of their game pieces at the Birja is the only sound that fills the main street of Shahumyani at noon, sometimes interrupted by a passing car. While the Dom Kultury from Soviet times is closed and slowly being overtaken by the trees taking up space in the forecourt, the library and the adjacent museum in memory of the conductor Alexander Melik-Pashayev still open their doors every day.

How is history told in a room full of books in Georgian, Armenian and Russian? What is the present of a library subsisting in Soviet legacies? How do book stocks, languages and wishes of the readers change with time? Who is taking care of this multi-lingual archive of shifting political, ideological and national projects? In the South Caucasian village of Shaumyani in Georgia, inhabited mainly by Armenians, not far from the borders with Armenia and

Azerbaijan, we were able to explore these questions.

During several encounters and conversations with the librarians Mariam Galichyan, Salome Paravyan and Varsik Baghiryan, and the museum employee Rita Taranyan, we had the opportunity to listen to them speak about the past, the transient and the already lost. We were able to observe their work with books and learn how they fill a place that seems doomed to decay, with visions for a future and life.

The short documentary emerging from this encounter will be released in early 2023.

Thank you Mariam Galichyan, Salome Paravyan, Varsik Baghiryan and Rita Taranyan for your trust and your stories.

A warm thanks to Hermine Virabian for translating into Armenian, Lala Iskandarli for translating into Azerbaijani, Ketevan Lapachi for translating into Georgian and Vani Aslikyan for helping us find our ways around the village!





A house facade in Sadakhlo (2022), by Nutsa Lomsadze

THE SEVDA OF SADAKHLO

by Ana Kvichidze, Catherine Steiner & Klara Böck

Borderland and common territories. When we started field research in the context of the summer school, we had little idea how the place where we were about to spend a week manifested these topics.

Trying to understand the analogy of bordered places and common territories in Sadakhlo, a village on the Armenian-Georgian border inhabited by Azerbaijanis, three different border constellations became apparent:

1. The physical, geopolitical border point as characteristic landmark dominating the village's atmosphere;
2. The bordered structure of the built environment within the village itself, where the public sphere seems to be shielded from the outsider's eye and divided from what might at first sight appear to be public;
3. The inner division of common spaces,

especially in forms of gender borders. This becomes visible in the usage of the spaces behind the walls – the male dominated Chaikhanas and the female marked courtyards.

By bringing the Chaikhana, a public tea house belonging to the Azerbaijanian culture of the village, to the exhibition space in Tbilisi and counter framing it with the “female” world of mystery and superstition, we newly assembled the border structures we experienced during our fieldwork.

Space and its usage is a language that changes its meaning and implications by context, usage and angle of perspective. While we were stunned by the borders dominating the village life, when we left by the end of the week, we were no longer focused on the divisions but on the life that happens between and behind the walls.

Just as “sadness” can become “love” when changing the cultural context (“Sevda” meaning love in Azerbaijani and sadness in Georgian სევდა), the walls of Sadakhlo were no longer borders. They became carriers of stories and simply the surroundings of the places we were able to get to know.

Sadakhlo is by definition a border place. It is the town located closest to the Armenian border and the checkpoint is a part of the town’s structure. At the same time, borders seemed for us to be in many different ways the main characteristics of the town as we experienced it.

Border passing

The official, geopolitical border is prominent within the town’s imagery. Trucks, buses and marshrutkas wait on the main square of the town as well as in the area in front of the checkpoint to pass the border. Tourists, usually scarcely seen in this region, pass the village to continue their journey in the next country on their tour of the Caucasian region. We saw travelers in camping vans stopping at the bakery before leaving Georgia. Cyclists rang their bells and waved while rolling up to the border and experiencing the process of border crossing in a much more physical way than those traveling by bus or car. The acts of crossing, waiting, leaving, and returning are omnipresent on the streets of Sadakhlo. The area around the border point is full of street vendors bringing fruits and vegetables from the region to sell to the travelers, drawing a reminiscent picture of what this area had been before the border closed: A place of transaction and exchange. Even though these words might still be used descriptively when talking about Sadakhlo, it felt as if they have lost their power and have become empty shells of bureaucratic transactions.

Bordered streets

The spatial experience of Sadakhlo itself and its built structure is a translation

of the presence of the border in a built environment. Walking the streets of Sadakhlo, one is surrounded by borders. Houses are closed off by high walls and gates, the main street is a vein leading the passers-by straight through the center and to the border. Its side roads end in narrow labyrinths or dead ends. On the other side of town, a river and mountains frame the street as a natural border. The political border is a clear focus point of the movements on the street, while the village is bordering itself against the eyes of the visitor. The social life of Sadakhlo is not visible at first sight.

Common places

When looking for the common places – spaces for exchange and community – we were again confronted with the image of the border. The main street becomes the main space of interaction and transgression. Here too, street vendors sell produce and chicken, shops open up to the street and men are standing on the sidewalk, observing. The horizontally oriented structure of this common area again mirrors the idea of the border. There does not seem to be a gathering but rather a passing and waiting, giving space to social interaction that feels both temporal and static. Just like the border is a place of constant movement and total stagnation, for the visitor the streets of Sadakhlo become spaces where action seems visible but not tangible.

We saw men sitting or standing alongside the road but not interacting with one another. Chicken for sale in cages, but no one there to sell them. Shops open, but not frequented. Horses grazing in a dried-out riverbed.

We reached a point of frustration, running against an invisible, yet more than obvious border of social interaction. Not only were the houses and places of Sadakhlo closed off by high gates, but we didn’t even seem to see the doorknob. Not speaking the language, most of us



Abandoned bazaar area in Sadakhlo (2022), by Onur Ceritoglu

not familiar with the cultural context, all of us were having a very personal border experience.

Behind the borders

We knocked on doors, trying to start a conversation and to understand where the public life was taking place.

In the center of the village, we found two Chaikhanas where the men spend their day. There, we found ourselves confronted with the reality of another border: the gendered one. While some of us spent time in this strictly male meeting point, the rest went out to find the female counterpart. We were able to join a wedding celebration, met local teachers and learned how to bake bread.

All these different experiences were connected by a common ground: the sharing of food, and thus a sharing of

Sevda – in its Georgian, but mostly in the Azerbaijani meaning.

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