##  BLUE, WHITE AND CLEAN








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It did not happen too often back in my childhood that I passed through that place in a car, and I always had the feeling that beyond a certain huge red-brick house, in the middle of an average Georgian village called Magharo, a different world began all of a sudden, where blonde boys and girls walked around barefoot; cackling flocks of white geese crossed dirt roads; and women carried water in buckets hanging on "koromislas" placed over their shoulders. This world did not last too long: as soon as you had passed rows of mud-brick Russian houses lined up on either side, with pointed triangular roofs and wooden balconies, you found yourself back in a usual environment, in Magharo. Yet, even those few minutes were enough to throw you out Georgian reality spread in space and time, make you see with your own eyes one old Russian village, and fill you up with odd feelings and curiosity and have you "return to your motherland" after a brief trip. This already peculiar reality did not seem to






















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need that small signpole with information on it, driven into the ground next to the huge red-brick house. It was clear anyway where the village of Ulianovka began and where it ended.

Those were more of my early childhood memories. I happened to have been to Ulianovka several times since that; not just passing through, but purposefully visiting there:

The first time was a bit later when our teacher of Russian who was a Greek herself and was married to Vasil Loskutov, the Principal of the Ulianovka High School (needless to say, against the will of the spouse's relatives: Molokans are prohibited to marry representatives of other confessions), displayed courage and took us to Ulianovka to a New Year's Eve carnival during our final year in school. Poor soul, she tried everything to have us join group dance at least, yet, she did not succeed much: in the end, "they" were having fun on their own and "we on our own.

The second time was in 2003 when I was supposed to implement the project Molokans - Women's Oral Histories sponsored by the Women's Program of the Open Society - Georgia foundation.

And now when I was supposed to shot video and photo materials on the Easter festivities for the project Celebrating Ethnic Diversity in Kakheti.

I arrived in Ulianovka on Friday of the Passion Week, what we call the Red Friday. The monotonous appearance of the village created by the whiteness of the houses built in a certain distance from one another had been tremen-

 That's where we knead our noodle dough








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dously distorted，even in com－ parison with 2003．Blackened spaces in the abandoned，half－ ruined buildings or those re－ modeled with concrete blocks by their new，Georgian owners had brought a lot of striking grey into the picture．Neither could one smell the most deli－ cious aroma of paschal cakes baked in Russian pechkas： stoves；the aroma that used to issue forth from every house and spread throughout the en－ tire village on that day．I searched thoroughly hoping to find a house where I could tape the baking．Already a handful of elderly women kept refer－ ring me to one another and saying，I＇m not able anymore， maybe she＇s baking．One per－ son they all agreed upon that she baked turned out to be relatively young Tanya Khamutova．Yet，she absolu－ tely refused to participate in vi－ deotaping．I blamed that on their traditional reticence，I had had enough of that while working there in 2003．I real－ ized the true reason later， though．Molokans consider it a deadly sin to sell paschal cakes for profit；they equal it to sell－ ing the Body of Christ．As for Tanya，she baked and sold．．．It was already dark when I barely made it for shooting to yet another young woman＇s































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to bring up from the spring, change cases over fluffy goose down pillows and cozy them up on ritualistically made up beds, starch spotless aprons and headscarves for festal prayers.

Cleanliness is not mandatory for Molokans on Easter alone. Special attitude toward it is one of their distinguishing features. That is probably why they prefer azure and white everywhere and in everything, to them these are the colors of divine sanctity and purity. It is precisely these colors that the name of the sect is associated with which, according to one of the most widespread versions, they acquired because its followers drank milk during the lent. Molokans accepted the name with pleasure because they considered the teaching of the sect to be the "verbal milk" provided in the Scripture. Milky in combination with various
tints of blue is the basic color in the prayer house as well, where they have neither icons (they do not venerate icons, light candles or cross themselves) nor candles nor any kind of adornment. There are only blue walls, a table with a white tablecloth over it, and long wooden benches in the main hall. Next door, in a sizeable kitchen, everything that could be painted is painted blue: walls, a ceiling-high wooden cupboard and two massive stoves: one is common Russian and the other lower, as if cut in half, with four humungous vats built in it. Only one of them is shiny, the rest are rusted at the bottom, two have been neglected for quite some time and their colors obviously do not go in sync with the general palette. They did not use that single shiny vat on Saturday either; they heated up water in a samovar and




















kneaded dough for noodles. Everything followed its own predetermined order: who sat where, what and when he was supposed to do... It is true tiotia: auntie Galia and Nastia were having a hard time kneading dough (due to their age) but it was "their duty", they had to fulfill it. Those who were supposed to roll out the paste and sat around the table with rolling pins lined up lengthwise in front of them did not even offer to help. They were waiting for their turn to get to work; that is why tiotia Nadia who was a bit late did not ask anything: as soon as she entered, she put on an apron and silently took her place at the head of the table with women with rolling pins. In a little while, it was indeed their turn and the seemingly slow process that started with kneading picked up, grew stronger, had everyone around become

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carried away by his duty, and finally reached its highest: some rolled dough balls, some rolled out the paste, some spread it on long boards (there was a separate person assigned to do that), two took turns drying it up in a heated stove and one took dried-out dough off the board. Flying of dough and pleasant aroma reigned there; yet, not for even an instance was there a hint of chaos. Even Presbyter Matvei Ivanovich did not enter the room at that time so that he would not impede, break the chain of the consecutive actions of the women that succeeded one another in both time and place with amazing precision. However, before that he glanced at the preparation process once or twice, sat down, gave the women a couple of instructions. He even exchanged jokes with two helpers observing from the door and left.










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[^0]Cut noodles filled a large aluminum bowl; they did not boil it, they saved for the next day. That is when the preparation stage ended. They had tea in haste and left for their homes to heat up Russian baths because everyone has to be clean for Easter.

Prayers began early Sunday morning. The Presbyter and his two assistants sat at the table. The choir adorned with white aprons and headscarves took their places at the table facing one another. As a rule, the further a worshipper sits the more modest his status in the community. Today, however, it is impossible to determine one's social status, even the main seats are not occupied, let alone side seats where the relatively young are said to sit as a rule. Now, these chairs are placed upside down on top of
one another, leaned up against the back wall. The prayers lasted a long time. Each verse from the Psalms relevant to the festivity read by the Presbyter read was repeated and chanted by the women. They even dared to correct him once or twice, " You're supposed to read this first"; but all that the preacher did was change the timbre or raise his voice, the women fell silent and replied with chanting. In the meantime, Katya was boiling noodles in beef bouillon, and Aunt Maria was preparing compote. As I left the main room, I suddenly entered exactly when she put a glass straight into the pot and tasted it. When I clicked my camera, she asked, " You've caught me, haven't you?"

When the prayers were over they all rose up at once, slid aside the chairs and made a circle.






























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 Tea drinking from chant to chant

After a 15 minute break that followed the prayers, two tables were set up, one across the entire hall, the other half way across, and everyone seated himself around them. In 2003, when they were commemorating the fortieth day after their fellow villager's repose in Russia, there were four tables in the main hall and two in the kitchen and the narthex. They would comment themselves, "Oh, we used to be numerous enough to require twentyfive samovars." The samovar retains special importance to them to this day, as a practical item as well as a preserved and inseparable symbol of their traditional way of life.

On white tablecloths spread over the tables they set common utensils that they had taken out of the blue cupboard: china teapots, faceted glasses with tiny white saucers, painted wooden spoons and deep enamel bowls; next to them they placed paschal cakes sliced right on the table and "perogi" pies. Along the center of the table they lined up in equal distance plates with equal amounts of sugar and candy elaborately distributed on them. Everything proceeded in accordance with precise etiquette. The reception started with chants; at some point, they brought in eight boiling samovars and placed them on the table. Then they read appropriate prayers and only after their completion the Presbyter order tea to be poured. Yet, they did not drink it right away, they chanted again first; that is how the dinner proceeded from prayer to prayer,

46. bubua hon nbo3 sibymos While the tea is still hot














with the Presbyter giving commands, "Have some tea (the women poured tea on saucepans and sipped on it in intervals; that is some sort of tradition as well); Taste noodles; Pour compote; drink it." They only call it a dinner; in reality, it is a constituent part of a religious ritual. Drinking of compote marked the end of the dinner and the paschal festivity. After the final chant, the women went outside (save a couple who cleaned the table and washed the utensils with remaining hot water from the samovars) and walked together down the main country road for a while. Then one by one they split headed toward their homes. Three or four women with blue knitted jackets, snow-white aprons and headscarves continued their path steadily and slowly for quite a while. Then they split, too. In the meantime, I loaded my equipment

in the car and left. Before rows of Russian houses ended, we passed by several tables brought out of the houses and put on the roadside. Most of them were served with paschal cakes baked in stove and covered with cellophane; young Georgian women dressed in black were selling them. There was only one table with two middle-aged Molokan women sitting at it. They had an old fashioned coat rack standing next to it; china plates, teapot and a samovar were served on the milk-white tablecloth. Next to the table, a huge puffy pillow barely fit on a chair; it must have been stuffed with goose down. The women looked down the road in hopeless wait for a customer that paschal day.
 The compote has been served, and the dinner is almost over


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    Preparing the noodles

