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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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The Tailor¹

Thoma Sukhashvili

The art project ‘The Tailor’ tells the story of my mom, Maia Sukhasvili, and the first flag of Georgia. The flag was gifted to my dad and was remodelled by my mom, first as a dress, then as a bag for carrying products. This demonstrates how a purely national symbol can become an item for daily use.

The Flag, 1990

Your dad brought the flag in 1990. It was a personal gift from Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who gave it to him before he became the president of Georgia. It was said that the burgundy symbolized Georgian blood and the black and white in the left corner represented war, pain, loss, and ethnic conflicts. However, our family were internationalists who were constantly visited by friends of different nationalities and religions—Ossetians, Russians, Chechens, Azeris, Ingushetians, Armenians, and so on—this flag brought nothing to us but ridicule from the nationalists.

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.



Thoma Sukhashvili and Maia Sukhashvili, 'The Tailor', as displayed in the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas, n.d. Photograph by Zsuzsa Millei.

The Dress, 1993

I always used to sew my own clothes. I also worked at a factory for a while until I got married. When the war started, everything, including clothes, became harder to find. At that time, I had already had my first child and I was very thin, no longer in good shape. There were no jobs, so I was unemployed. While your dad was fighting in the Abkhazia War for several months, I had no choice but to sew a dress from the flag. I was constantly wondering and worrying about how others would perceive it. To be honest, I was afraid that people would tell me that I should not have sewed it and I would have felt ashamed.

Once I took you to the doctor while wearing the dress. It was a cold day and the doctor asked if I had anything else to wear. I said nothing, I did not know whether she recognized the flag cloth or whether she mocked me because the dress was not suitable for the cold weather. I could not even tell her that I did not have any other dresses, or that I sewed this one from the flag because I was afraid she would get angry with me. When your dad arrived and saw the dress, he did not say anything but I could tell that he was a little bit offended. However, he knew that our family did not have any other choice.

The Bag, 1996

Things got harder after I had my second child. He was born with two congenital diseases. However, we could not survive by staying home. I was forced to work outside the village, bringing and selling fruits and other products in Tbilisi. This was how I earned money for bread and medicine. As I did not have a big bag, I thought the dress could be turned into a bag as it was made out of durable cloth. I remodeled the flag/dress into a bag and went to 'Dezerter Bazaar', using it to carry home things.