FROM SURVIVAL TO BUSINESS: RENEGOTIATING VALUE IN THE GEORGIAN DRY BRIDGE FLEA MARKET

By
Nanuka Iashvili

Central European University Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors

Prof. Alexandra Kowalski

Prof. Claudio Sopranzetti

Vienna, Austria

2023

Abstract

This thesis explores the Dry Bridge Flea Market in the heart of Tbilisi and the work and life of its vendors. Emerging during the turmoil of the collapse of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, the market is a peculiar example of a public vending site that survived privatization and evictions and is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Tbilisi today. The historical and ethnographic focus of the market necessarily generates questions about value, how it is produced and who is going to capture it. Drawing on value theory of anthropology as an inspiration and conceptual framework, I think of value constantly in the process of construction by actors (Graeber 2001). By looking at the market and its history over the past 30 years, I argue that the questions of value, the evaluation and negotiation of what is valuable in the newly independent state as it gets integrated into the global market economy come in a particular light. Drawing on archival research and months of fieldwork, I zoom into the sellers of the Dry Bridge Flea Market to show how they navigate and negotiate their importance and [un]importance and how the processes influence the value of the objects they sell.

Acknowledgments

A small step in what I hope will be a long journey of thinking about values and markets, yet so much support and gratitude. I would not have been able to carry out this research without the time and energy of the people at the Dry Bridge Flea Market, therefore my first thanks goes to all of them.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors who provided me with advice and guidance throughout the two years. To Claudio for helping me make sense of my field and value of my thesis, as well as for the word play 'value of the market, market value of the objects' that has defined my thinking. To Alex for en-riching my work with her theoretical contributions and for teaching me how to think broadly. I thank Prem Kumar Rajaram, Ayse Caglar and Violetta Zentai for their help in framing my research. To the whole SocAnthr department - the faculty, Ildi and Annamaria and the PhD students for great two years.

Enormous debt goes to the best part of these two years: to the people I have met in Vienna. To Damla, always by my side for the two years; and especially for the last two weeks as we persevered together. To Maryam and Carla for the big love and great friendship. To Zsofi for being a calming presence during unsettled times. To dearest Elaheh, Vicky, Ahmed. To Dima and Emma, who make fun of my Russian but have helped me make sense of the Slavic words from the field. To my Georgian friends in Vienna, Ele, Nanuka, Teo, Mariam, Oto, for their insightful thoughts, and to our political arguments some of which have inspired the conclusion. To my cohort from last year most of whom have left Vienna and are dearly missed. To the new ones who have taken their spots in the library and have made this year special.

To my friends in Georgia and to my friends in Berlin for your digital support. A special thanks to Anna who has been with me as a guide, translator and a savior as we have fought our way through the two German-speaking countries; thank you to her for masterful editing skills and thoughtful words. I am forever grateful to my family for never ending support every step of the way. To my mother, father and brother, to my most precious grandparents whose love and support I received every day; and to my aunts, uncles, and cousins who always think I don't call them enough. I want to end with thanking Slobodan for his huge support. Without him this thesis would not look the way it does, as he kept providing food for thought and sustenance.

List of Figures

Table of Contents

Introduction

> 'If you're looking for a unique shopping experience in Tbilisi, Georgia, look no further than the Dry Bridge Flea Market. Located in the heart of the city, this open-air market is a treasure trove of antique and vintage goods, handcrafted items, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs' reads the blog post on Tbilisi Local Guide.[1]

In the recent decade, the Dry Bridge Flea Market has become a famous tourist attraction in Tbilisi. What started as a means of earning an income for the unemployed in the early 1990s transformed into a 'treasure trove' - a place "of valuable or delightful things" for tourists. Although urban, informal markets are a common phenomenon in the post-Socialist and post-Soviet space (Humphrey 1999; Schlögel 2012; Grubbauer and Kusiak 2012), they are often confined to the 'transition period' and are expected to disappear or relocate to the peripheries after the country's 'successful' shift to a market economy (Melkumyan 2018). Alternatively, they become tourist destinations where the original vendors are displaced and give way to the new sellers.[2] Neither of these scenarios is fully applicable to the Dry Bridge Flea Market: the market appeared during the post-Soviet transition period but has long outlasted it with original sellers still dotting the pavements. More so, it developed into a significant attraction site today. The Dry Bridge Flea Market is a fruitful entry point into understanding the transformation of Tbilisi (and its perception) from a poor and shady capital of the corrupt country (Van Assche, Salukvadze, and Shavishvili 2009) into a burgeoning and hip destination. Therefore, before entering the field, I aimed to ask and answer the following questions: How and why did the market emerge, and how did it remain in the heart of Tbilisi? What can be said about the broader socio-economic processes in the city and country by looking at the Dry Bridge Flea Market?

[1] *The Dry Bridge Flea Market, A Popular Market.* Tbilisi Local Guide, https://tbilisilocalguide.com/tbilisi/dry-bridge-flea-market/ (Last Accessed 01.06.2023).

[2] Beyond the post-Soviet and post-Socialist literature, urban markets have been explored as significant public places of social cohesion and inclusion (Watson 2009), as spaces where social boundaries and hierarchies disappear (Morales 2009; Janssens and Sezer 2013) or as places for migrant incorporation (Etzold 2016) among others.

After spending time at the Dry Bridge Flea Market, I came to understand that conversations regarding the importance of the market and its value to Tbilisi and the country at large are the topics of everyday talks among the vendors.[3] This is not so surprising; after all, the market is an important tourist attraction and is a 'must see' site in Tbilisi. Nonetheless, this perspective was frequently complemented by near opposite statements: the market is unimportant, it's just a flea market of second-hand and used things, and the vendors there do not sell anything of value. Because of this tension, my questions multiplied: how could I make sense of the contradictory statements regarding the importance of the market? Additionally, how could I connect these negotiations of value and importance to the socio-economic processes in the country that the Dry Bridge Flea Market was a manifestation of?

Ultimately, as I have come to claim, the larger story of the flea market and transformation of Tbilisi as well as the actions and discourses of the vendors working the market, are all related to the question of value. So how could I think about value within and value of the market?

Value has been theorized widely by economists, sociologists, political economists and anthropologists alike. With his labor theory of value, Marx was already in conversation with Ricardo and Smith before him (Graeber 2001). While Mauss, Malinowski and Simmel had all been building their work on value, their analysis of money, gift, commodities or exchange was based on the traditions of thought that came prior to them.

"To inquire into value, however defined is to step into, across and even beyond analytical separations that often have been more assumed than examined," writes Pedersen (2008) arguing that thinking about value cuts through different spheres and often brings disparate things into a common focus. More radically, Terence Turner is often seen as one of the leading figures attempting to develop a value theory of anthropology that could be applied to capitalist and non-capitalist societies alike. Primarily influenced by Marx's labor theory of value, Turner (2008) argued

[3] Throughout the thesis, I use vendors (street vendors) and sellers interchangeably, as well as vending and selling. When referencing Rekhviashvili (2015a, 2015b) and Manning (2009) I use petty trading, to follow the authors' vocabulary.

that if we are to understand Marx's labor theory as a symbolic analysis of money, we can expand the understanding of labor (that for Marx is the source of production of value) to action.[4] Thinking of action as producing value was an essential project for Turner who, together with Nancy Munn (1992) is considered "pioneer of this line of thinking" (Otto and Willerslev 2013). In his *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*, David Graeber rediscovers and develops their ideas and pushes them further. What is critical in this line of thinking is that value is not intrinsic to an object or a product and is in formation; in other words, value is a construction through action (see also Eiss 2008; Keane 2008). In this thesis, I employ this literature as my foundation and expand on thinking about value negotiations in the post-Soviet city by zooming into the flea market at the center of Tbilisi.

So if my initial project considered the conversations and actions of the vendors that dealt with 'values' (such as their cultural and touristic importance or other forms of unimportances) as distinct from the economic transactions and conversations regarding 'value' (such as money-making or income), this has radically changed. The more I tried to delineate economic from cultural or social, the more fractured and incoherent the story became. What are the ways, then, of bringing them together? In this, I follow Graeber (2001) who asks: What are the implications of thinking of "value" and "values" as alterations of the same thing? According to him, if we start seeing the social world "as a mode of coordinated projects of human action" where people collectively make and remake the world (Graeber 2013, 220–22) such thinking boils down to thinking of value as importance of action as realized in the socially recognized form (225).

[4] Turner argues that Marx's "conception of value is the most direct link between [Marx's] critical analyses of political economy, above all his analysis of capitalist production in Capital, Grundrisse and other relatively later works, and his more anthropological conceptions of the dialectical unity of subjective action, consciousness, material activity and social relations found in his earlier works" (see Turner, 2008, p44). If we are to understand money as a symbol in Marx's work, then money is that which represents people's labor, but at the same time ends up being the thing people work for (to get paid). Money than is a material token of value, but a particular kind of a token: it represents action but also is the source of it (for the analysis see Graeber 2001).

Following this definition as related to the market, I believe, reveals a few significant points. First, it underscores that value is not a fixed, given measure. Second, it acknowledges that the vendors are primary actors in the production of value of the market (which might often be forgotten). Third, it allows for the understanding that vending is not the only 'action' that produces value in and of the market. In this way, all actions, initially categorized as economic or cultural, are not labeled as such and are considered as part of the creative action. Lastly, 'socially recognized form', which is the form of the market, necessitates the society, in Graeber's words, "the audience.' Therefore, in this way, it underscores that the value of the market does not exist in a vacuum in and of itself. It needs recognition. In the capitalist system, the recognition or the ultimate value is largely related to the capital and the state.

My ethnographic work is based on the fieldwork I conducted in Tbilisi. I spent three months visiting the Dry Bridge Flea Market from January to March 2023. Because of the cold winter days, few customers visited the open-air market, so the vendors had much time to talk to me and answer my questions. Therefore, I had the chance to conduct semi-structured interviews in the market and engage in conversations with the sellers as they unpacked and organized their objects on the stalls and waited for customers to arrive.[5] On the warmer days in March, as more people visited the market, I could observe the vendors and customers, their interactions and exchanges. In the cases when the conversations with the vendors led me to other individuals associated with the market, I followed the lead. This is how I talked to the former flea market vendors, who rent a hall not too far away from the Dry Bridge today; I also had chats with the painters who sell in the park nearby.

In order to reconstruct the market's history, I did archival work at the National Library in Georgia. I researched the history of the area and of the Dry Bridge itself. Although not directly incorporated

[5] I have changed the names of all the vendors to protect their privacy.

into the thesis, this historical exploration has informed and guided my thinking about the area. It is in the archives that I collected newspaper and journal articles specifically related to the Dry Bridge Flea Market and the vendors, and more generally about street vending and its prohibition, some of which I cite throughout the thesis. To understand the state's perspective and its relationship with the market, I collected information about the Tbilisi Development Fund, a town hall division and the primary actor in the area. Based on the interviews and documents provided by the fund, I gained insights into the renovation works of 2017-18 that I closely touch upon in the thesis. I complemented this information with online research of the fund, its director and designers as they discussed the rehabilitation works of the Dry Bridge area in interviews.

As already mentioned, the Dry Bridge Flea Market has become a famous tourist destination. To better understand the visitors' perceptions regarding the flea market, I looked at the websites and blogs directed towards and written by the tourists in English and Russian. The introductory quote for my thesis and other observations as related to tourists emerged from this digital search.

Thus, in what follows, I divide the work into three chapters. First, in *Transformation, Privatization, Marketization* chapter, I start where the market starts in the early 1990s and follow it until 2008 to show the valuation processes in post-Soviet Georgia as well as the perceptions of value and importance at different stages, as related to the vendors of the market and the country at large. In the second chapter, *Commodification, Tourism, Entrepreneurship,* I argue that 2008 is a crucial point after which the market is commodified, i.e. put on the market and the vendors start seeing themselves as entrepreneurs. I show how both of these processes are intertwined with the tourism industry. In the final chapter, in *Value of the Market and Market Value of Objects*, I describe the process of under-valuation of the market and contend that it is fundamental to attracting customers who are in search of cheap valuables. I talk about the objects in the market and the value of the market itself often shapes the objects' value.

Setting up the Market

The Dry Bridge Flea Market, colloquially referred to as simply Dry Bridge, is located in the central area of Tbilisi (Figure 1). A person walking from the parliament, opera, or the main theatre buildings towards the historical area of Chughureti across the river, will inevitably pass through the market. Bearing the name of the bridge,[6] the flea market is not located on it and occupies a broader perimeter.

Figure 1. The map of Tbilisi. The location of the market is encircled. The Kura River is the main source of orientation for the city's residents, as it divides Tbilisi into the left and the right banks.

[6] How this Dry Bridge came to be called "Dry" is an interesting story in itself. The Dry and Saarbrucken bridges were both built in mid-19th century during the Russian Tsarist rule. Referred to as Small and Big Vorontsov and Karl-Marx bridges at different times, the two structures were necessary to connect the two sides of the river due to a small island in-between the two banks (the territory of two parks today). In 1930s, the new Soviet project for the transformation of Tbilisi envisioned building embankment highways along the river (see Goncalves, Asanidze and Pinto 2016). Consequentially, the branch of Kura that divided the island from the land was dried out and the island disappeared. Since then, the small bridge, initially connecting the island to the right bank started to be referred to as the Dry Bridge. The Big Bridge has been renamed to be called Saarbrucken Bridge

The market in focus is on the right bank of the river, between and around the green area. (Source: GeorgiaToSee).[7]

Zooming in on the area, the two images below illustrate the locations of March 9, Mother Tongue Parks and the Dry and Saarbrucken Bridges. A Bridge Street connects the two bridges runs through the parks.

Fig. 2. Annotated map of the flea market area

Fig.3. Satellite view

A section of the flea market in focus is located on the pavements of both sides of Bridge Street. The images do not show that to get to either of the parks from the Bridge Street, one has to walk down the stairs. Thus, the bridge street cuts through but is also above the level of the parks and the river (this becomes important, especially in the interactions of the Town hall in the area section 2).

This is how the flea market looks on Bridge Street:

[7] https://georgiatosee.com/2017/05/tbilisi-map/

Fig. 4. Bridge Street

Fig.5. Bridge Street view from the other side

In Figure 4, one can see one side of the street.[8] Figure 5 shows the area on Figure 4 shot from across the street. The cars belong to the vendors who transport goods to their stalls every day. Parking on the street is unlawful and only tolerated during the day and for the flea market vendors.

[8] The photos are taken by the author unless indicated.

Fig.6. The same side of the sidewalk of the Bridge Street as Fig.4 and 5.[9]

The flea market is not confined to Bridge Street. It continues *down* along the river on a road that does not have a name; therefore, I will refer to it as Nameless Street.[10] The thick yellow lines on the map in Figure 7 (see below) designate the main highways on the left and right banks of the river. The highway on the right bank runs under the Dry Bridge, continuing alongside the March 9 Park. The highway and Nameless Street connect at the tip of March 9 Park, right where the Flea Market ends.

[9] Photo provided by Tbilisi Development Fund

[10] Tbilisi City Hall refers to this street as a "Nameless Street" in their reports, thus I follow this naming.

Fig.7. Annotated map with Nameless Street

This is how the market looks on each side of Nameless Street:

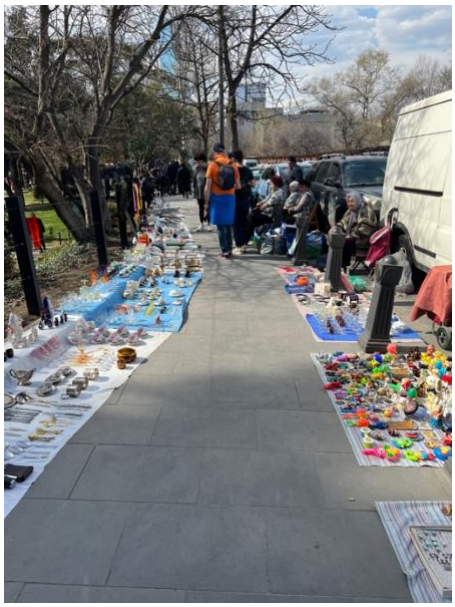

Fig. 8. One side of Nameless Street

Fig. 9. Another side of Nameless Street

In both images above, I took the photos while walking down Nameless Street from Bridge Street. Figure 8 shows one side of the market, while Figure 9 shows the other side of the street. March 9 Park is not just a park along which the flea market stretches; it is also the area where painters and local artists come to sell mostly handmade objects. The park is colloquially referred to as the "Painters' Garden." As will become apparent in the thesis, the two places come into

contact and diverge at different times. The two areas are separated from each other by the park's borders. Everything beyond and above[11] the park is the flea market. The two places are distinguished by the objects sold: the vendors at the flea market sell (or are supposed to sell) second-hand goods, while the people in the park sell (or, again, are supposed to sell) works of art. Thus, these two markets are somewhat different in their function. In this dissertation, I focus on the flea market and touch on the Painters' Garden as it comes into contact with the market in focus.

The vendors at the market do not have special permits for vending; thus, without registration, it is impossible to know how many regular vendors there are. Sunny weekends are the flea market's prime time; 40 to 70 people come to vend there, depending on the season. The regular workers have their designated spots that they have acquired over the years. Kinship relations and power hierarchies determine the transfer of spots on the market. While some vendors have built wooden stalls, others bring carpets or blankets to spread their goods. The exception is one side of Nameless Street (Fig.9), where the City Hall has constructed stalls for the sellers.

It is impossible to list all the objects sold at the market; they range from functional to decorative to historical objects. Many of the objects are second-hand, old, and historical, although there are quite a few new objects and souvenirs. Crockery and cutlery, cameras, binoculars, jewelry, Soviet medals, maps, portraits, watches, and knives are a few of the many things found at the flea market. No stark gender difference is noticeable in the market. Although, from personal observation, cutlery, crockery, and jewelry are primarily sold by women. Men most commonly sell knives and watches. Few researchers have noted that petty trading in Georgia is mostly dominated by middle-aged women (see Rekhviashvili 2015; Karchiladze 2018); this is not the case on the market.

[11] Considering the levels and stairs described above.

Chapter 1. Transformation, Privatization, Marketization (1990s-2008)

In this chapter, I trace the story of the market from its beginnings until 2008. In the first section, I situate the emergence of the market in the 1990s, when Georgia was starting its integration into the global market economy as an independent state. I describe the general sense of loss and search for value as characteristics of this period. Next, I follow the trajectory of the market into the 21st century and, in the second section, show that the privatization and the displacement of the Dry Bridge market vendors from their initial place of commerce was part of the broader marketization process of the emerging liberal state. The process was ultimately about the value of urban land. Lastly, leading up to 2008, I show that the ethnographic attention on the events at the Dry Bridge Flea Market reveals the country's successful marketization processes as well as the state's need to control the value of land.

1.1. "Otkhmocdaatianebshi," In the Nineties: A Search for Value

"Otkhmocdaatianebshi" is the answer I got over and over again at the Flea Market when I asked the vendors about the market's origins. 'Otkhmocdaatianebshi' literally translates to 'in the nineties'. In Georgia and Georgian, 'the nineties' refers to a very particular period of the early years of the post-Soviet transition, when the two conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and a civil war with its battleground in Tbilisi brought literal and figurative darkness in the country. Tbilisi, once the shining capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, is described as follows by the urban scholar Revaz Gachechiladze (Salukvadze, Golubchikov 2016:44):

> Factories stopped; so did most urban transport; electricity failed; central heating radiators became useless decorations in the apartments . . . The city emerged as unprepared for the new situation, unable to purchase raw materials, fuel or machinery at market prices and in the quantities required for an urban settlement of such a size.

As in other post-Soviet countries, the transition period had its winners and losers. Instability and unemployment, coupled with economic shortfall, caused many to start vending in the streets. As a result, petty trade became a common practice, and public bazaars and vending spots emerged in and around Tbilisi (Manning 2009). As Rekhviashvili (2015a) writes amateur building of stalls and kiosks was also legal at the time since the government could not provide much support to its citizens. Therefore, "During the 1990s, a remarkable share of the shopping was done in kiosks. Hundreds of them were dotting the pavements/sidewalks along the main streets of the city and clustered in specially organized open markets, so-called bazrobas[12] (a term derived from bazaar)" (Salukvadze 2009, 176). Meanwhile, the winners of the transition were redistributing the resources that were up for grabs (Van Assche, Salukvadze, and Shavishvili 2009).

The origins of the market go back to the period described above. The exact date remains unclear, although the vendors agree about the reasons that brought them there: the loss of their jobs and incomes after the Soviet regime collapsed. The sole academic article about the market describes the emergence of the Dry Bridge as "a way to adapt and survive in the new economic order […at the time when…] the people were forced to earn money by selling their personal belongings due to unemployment at that time" (Kovtiak 2018, 41). When asked about the initial location of the market, the vendors point towards the empty, now enclosed area right next to the Mtkvari River as the place "where it all began."

In a way, the story of the people who arrived at the Dry Bridge Market in the 1990s echoes the experiences of workers from many post-Soviet countries (see e.g. Verdery and Humphrey 2004; Alexander 2004). Most of the Dry Bridge vendors with one if not many university degrees, holding various positions and jobs during the Soviet times, found themselves unemployed or no longer fit for the new job market. Many of them lost stable in-door factory jobs due to the breaking down of the supply chains of industries that connected factories with demand across the Soviet

[12] I use bazrobas and private marketplaces interchangeably to talk about the markets where sellers pay for stalls.

Union. Others, who had held various secure positions across different fields, found themselves physically and symbolically "kicked out." As Manana, a 70-year-old woman working at the Dry Bridge Flea Market for decades, remembers:

> I was working in an atelier; we had great work and our products were taken to the Soviet Union. When it closed down, I came here and brought things I had at home. I used to arrive to the atelier like a queen [Karaleva[13]], I would remove my clothes and work on the weaving loom, then change back to my clothes and leave beautifully.

What Manana describes is, in one way, a sense of loss or "a sense of abandonment by an overarching structure" (Alexander 2004, 253) that has been discussed widely in post-socialist literature. A double sense of dispossession, as argued by Humphrey (2002), was a specific post-Soviet phenomenon that left people "deprived of property, work and entitlements, but in a second sense [left them] no longer possessed" (22). In the quote above, Manana retells multiple layers of loss shared by many in the market. Most of the vendors not only lost their work and income. They also lost the *importance* that came from their jobs. For Manana, being part of the factory that produced things for the Soviet Union mattered. A factory building where she could change signified 'an overarching structure' and decent working conditions, therefore a decent life outside of it in which she could walk 'beautifully'. It signified the importance of her labor.

In the particular case of the street vendors, these layers of loss of importance and overarching structures sharpened with unacceptance of the new occupation. "When the factory closed down, I came and stood here to sell few things," continues Manana to clarify that no one at the time saw vending as their new occupation or a permanent job. Partly, this was so because most saw vending as a temporary solution to what they thought or hoped would be a temporary problem. Partly, the unacceptance came from the general perception of the 'unrespectability' of trading as a profession. Trading as an occupation as noted by many, "was ideologically associated with 'speculation' and [was…] a despised activity" in the Soviet Union (Burawoy and Verdery

[13] Queen in Russian.

1999, 7). This deeply rooted prejudice outlived the country itself. Many market vendors remember how ashamed they were to be seen vending, especially by their colleagues. As a result, they often hid from them.

On the one hand, the market's history reveals the story of the 'losers': those who lost jobs and the importance that came with them were now selling things from home to make ends meet. On the other hand, the existence of the market, by extension, also meant that some could buy. If the story of the winners and losers simplifies the post-Soviet period, in its broadest sense, it is revealing of the social dynamic at the heart of the early 1990s - the times referred to as the "dark 90s," a name that points precisely, in everyday language, at an unequal social order where some had to sell and others who could buy.

The market also highlights a broader dynamic of the time that goes beyond the simple binary of winners and losers. "We did not know at the time what was valuable and what was in demand. I would look at the people next to me and see they managed to sell something. Then, I would go home, look for those things and bring them here to sell," tells me Mzia, a long-standing seller at the market, and with this she highlights the general lack of information and utter confusion that the post-Soviet transition period is often described. Even those in charge of the country's transition were confused, and as Alexander (2004) writes, the deputy chief of privatization in Kazakhstan once told her: "There was no market at the time, so how were we to know what price something could be bought or sold for? (264). Therefore, broadly speaking, as Georgia was leaving the Soviet world and joining the global market economy as an independent republic, an extended sense of loss of importance coupled with searching for what was becoming valuable in the new system began largely at this point.

1.2. A New Decade: Privatization of Urban Land and Marketization

For the next few years, the Dry Bridge Flea Market kept growing; more people arrived and became regulars, and very few left. Those who left the market also left the country, I have been told, as what else there was to do? The ones who came to the market did not sell one or two things and leave, as initially expected. Meanwhile, in the new decade, privatization and the commodification of urban land became the primary activities of the National Movement Party (Rekhviashvili 2015b) and the Dry Bridge market got caught up in these processes as well.

After the so-called Rose Revolution in 2003,[14] a newly formed National Movement, pro-Wester party came to power with Mikheil Saakashvili as its leader. Economic upheaval, fight against corruption, increased penalties, and decreased crime rates were the hallmarks of the pro-western liberal regime.[15] In the first years of coming to power, Saakashvili announced the fight against street vending in public spaces. If street vending was considered speculation in the Soviet Union and the 1990s, it was further stigmatized as illegitimate and uncivil in the new liberal regime. Street vending became associated with corruption and informality. Post 2003, business-friendly reforms and general promotion of entrepreneurialism were starkly opposed to illegitimate vending, where the traders were portrayed as cheaters "undermin[ing] the state authority and ly[ing] to their customers" (Rekhviashvili 2015a). Further stigmatization of street vending was a necessary condition for marketization processes.

In 2006, street vendors were already required to purchase and use cash registers which facilitated their monitoring. The same year, the state started prohibited trade in public spaces and

[14] The Rose Revolution was a peaceful change of power from Eduard Shevardnadze, the second president of Georgia and a former Soviet politician, to Mikheil Saakashvili. It took place on 23rd of November 2003 when Saakashvili and his supporters stormed the parliament session with red roses in their hands.

[15] The post-Revolutionary state's "strict adherence to the principles of Washington Consensus" is noted by many (though Rekhviashvili (2015a) adds that the Saakashvili government's reforms are often post-Washington consensus. Therefore emphasis is on anti-corruption and formalization of economy is key.

violently enforced the rules.[16] Newly reorganized police force was executing the state orders. Vending in public places without special permits (which, as Rekhviashvili (2015a) writes were only given to very few private companies) became illegal. As Zviad Archuadze, the then Head of Tbilisi City Hall's Economic Policy Department, said, "The winners [those who would receive the permits to vend in public spaces] will be determined by the state and be given to those who will pay the most" (Manavlishvili 2004).[17] As a consequence, the city started to be cleaned of the 'losers': "visual changes include[d] the removal of small traders who had resided in underground passageways and large bazaar areas in the center of town" (Frederiksen 2012, 127). The excuses for the prohibition of vending ranged from illegality and privatization to hygiene and product sanitation issues. In the case of the Dry Bridge Flea Market, the area was sold to Kartu Bank according to the official records. [18]

"Somewhere around 2007-8, right before the war, all of a sudden, they announced that someone had purchased the land next to the river and that we have to leave," remembers Manana. "No one told us anything else; we just had to leave," she continues. With this abrupt decision, forcing the sellers to vacate the market territory they had used for more than a decade, the Dry Bridge Flea Market operations came to a halt.

The vendors who left the market were looking for a new place to settle. Every day they came back to sell in parks and sidewalks nearby and every day the police would chase them away.

[16] As Rekhviashvili writes: "According to observers, by 2007, just prior to the privatization of public marketplaces, public marketplaces hosted up to 100,000 persons (international trade union confederation, 2008)" (Rekhviashvili 2015b; 484).

[17] In the same interview he also adds that "those that vend on a property that they own, will not have any issues. The payment will only be required of those who vend on the state's property, meaning it will only be required from the street vendors. […] it is quite possible that the same person wins the tender for the whole city, though theoretically quite possible, we are trying to solve this issue in other ways."

[18] Up until today, 2023, the rumors regarding who owns the place and why circulate. The most common rumor is that Bidzina Ivanishvili, then a famous millionaire connected to Russia and owner of Kartu Bank was forced to buy the land by Mikheil Saakashvili. Forceful purchase of lands was not an uncommon practice at the time. Bidzina Ivanishvili, people say, was asked by Saakashvili to build a ballet school there in the name of the famous ballet dancer who had ties with Russia as well. But then the 2008 Russo-Georgian war began and the plans got cancelled. Though it is unconfirmed whether that was the case, the land did get registered under the Kartu Bank in 2008, which is the bank owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili. Already in 2008 then it has been transferred to a private company that is again related to the same person. Up until today, the land belongs to that company. Meanwhile, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the head of the Dream Party, won the elections in 2012 against Saakashvili's government. Dream Party is still the majority party in the parliament and Bidzina Ivanishvili is largely seen as ruling the country.

The police did not only attack the vendors but also confiscated their goods and broke their crockery (personal interviews). Extremely violent interactions and incidents between the police and the sellers have also been recorded.[19] Privatization of the land formerly occupied by the Dry Bridge Flea Market sellers is hardly surprising from the perspective of a liberal state, especially in the post-Soviet context (Verdery and Humphrey 2004). Starting from the massive, country-wide privatization of housing in the early 1990s (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze, and Gentile 2011), the privatization was seen as a key process in the 2000s as attracting investments and pursuing redevelopments projects were a cornerstone of the new post-2003 state (Gugushvili 2017).[20]

Nevertheless, why were the vendors kicked out from the areas that were not to be privatized? As Rekhviashvili (2015b) argues, the key is not to look at the specific lands that have been privatized due to which the vendors in Tbilisi were evicted but to look at the broader marketization process in Georgia. "The state needed to restrict access to public space as a free/unlimited productive resource and limit its commercial use to delineate public and private property and allow commodification of urban land and property" (491). The Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors were still an issue after being kicked out of the privatized land since, due to their informal activities in the public space, they were getting in the way of commodifying urban land and property. For "the government so dependent on revenues derived from the privatization process, it was important to support the creation of property markets and ensure that the value of urban property rose" (485).

If the 1990s were a period of questioning and determining what value was, the new government in the 21st century saw urban land as valuable and started commodifying it. The commodification of urban land was necessitated and coupled with further criminalization of street

[19] I was also told that one person died fleeing the police.
[20] Gugushvili 2017 calls it a "full-scale privatization". A famous phrase of the Minister of Economy of Georgia at the time was that the government was ready to sell everything except its conscience (see (Mchedzlidze 2004; Gugushvili 2017; Owen 2005).

vending**.** In what follows, I will show how the government was successful in establishing and maintaining the demand for the private property market.

1.3. Matryoshkas vs Antiques: Private Bazrobas against Street Vendors

Tired of running away from police, a group of thirty women formerly vending at the Dry Bridge Flea Market, decided to rent an indoor space across the river from the old market location. They opened a new store and called it "The Dry Bridge 2008" (see Fig.9). As the women at the store told me, they escaped police but also wanted "to have more civilized and orderly working conditions" (personal interview).

Meanwhile, a small section of the land on which the former market operated (on the map below) was rented out to an individual who built (rather, re-built) the wooden stalls, organized storage space and opened an Antique Market. As Nana, the vendor renting a stall at the Antique Market from 2008 onwards told me: "They tore down bazrobas and then rebuilt it themselves. They tore it down because people worked for free, and when they demolished and rebuilt them, they already started making money off us."[21]

[21] Renting a one-meter stall for a month at this Antique Market costs 150 Laris. 150 Laris is equivalent to around 55 euros. The workers there also pay additionally for the storage space.

Fig. 10. Annotated map incl. "Dry Bridge 2008" and the new Antique Market.

When the Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors today remember the years 2008-2009 and say: Everyone who had a bit of money and could afford to move inside and pay rent, did so in those days. Overall, the state chased street vendors all around the city away from the streets and right into the privatized in- and out-door markets where the sellers were now asked to pay rent for stalls (Rekhviashvili 2015a). Therefore, the street vending prohibition policies proved successful from the perspective of the state**.** Not only the state successfully commodified land and created an institution of private property, but also generated a demand for that very market. Now, the demand had to be maintained.

The Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors, those who could not afford or refused to pay rent, kept sporadically showing up in the area, especially in the Painter's Garden (see Fig. 10 for the location of the Painter's Garden). The artists in the park were untouched by the police.[22] The more the number of vendors gathered in the park increased, the more frequent the attacks from the

[22] Personal interview with the artists.

police became. As one of the painters told me, it is because the painters contributed to the city's culture and the aesthetic beautification that the artists could remain in the park.

Academics who have also attempted to explain the state's attack on the public vending and the broader ideological reasons behind it, have also (like the painters) rationalized state's actions via political and cultural arguments. As Manning (2009) argues, the pro-European government saw bazaars as oriental and Eastern, therefore took an "aesthetic offence" at them (342). As Khutsishvili (2012) writes, the state fought against the bazaars since it "undervalue[d] and ignore[d]" the bazaar culture as 'irrational' and oriental (also see (Jones 2012). According to this understanding, the state saw the artists and painters selling their works of art as valuable since they contributed to the European and 'cultured' image of the state (in contrast to the 'oriental' markets). Though partly true, the political and cultural arguments alone cannot account for the complete picture of the prohibition of public vending (Rekhviashvili 2015). A closer look at the Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors and their interactions with the police during the intense prohibition years offers some answers.

"Then, in the later days, the police allowed me to sell Matryoshkas,[23] but not the antiques," says Mzia when remembering her days in the Painter's Garden. As it appears, the state tolerated selling paintings or Matryoshkas, whereas antiques were strongly prohibited from being sold. The answer cannot purely lie in the aesthetic quality of the objects sold (how can a small wooden Matryoshka be more visually appealing than colorful antique vase?); neither can it lie in the Europeanization of the city's landscape. Matryoshkas are closely associated to Russian culture; therefore if National Party's sole interest was the Europeanization of the city's landscape, why would the police allow the vendors to sell Matryoshkas but not the antiques? Especially after the

[23] Matryoshkas are Russian wooden dolls that come in sets of identical decreasing-in -size figures, placed inside each other. These dolls, often being designed according to different themes, are decorative and do not have a particular functional use

Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, Saakashvili's state condemned not only the Russian state but also culture and everything else associated with it.[24]

Turning attention to the expanding private bazaars and marketplaces offers some answers. From the late years of the 1990s and into the early 2000s, more and more private Bazrobas and markets (chain market brands) appeared in Tbilisi.[25] Saakashvili's policies were successful, and the majority of the street vendors were finally and forcefully sent inside private markets and started paying rent. Since the new and private bazrobas often opened in the spots of former public bazaars, the illegal and often mobile public vendors started showing up next to the entrances or nearby the private markets. As the street vendors did not pay rent, they could afford to set lower prices for the same products that the vendors inside the markets sold; therefore, the customers, preferring lower prices often stayed away from bazrobas (Tukhiashvili 2009b).

The inability to control the prices of products and losing customers caused problems. Most of the land (or buildings) on/in which private bazaars operated were owned by individuals who leased the areas out. The bazaar administrators then rented the spaces from the owners, constructed stalls and managed the markets (e.g. storage, security, etc.). The stalls were then rented by individual vendors, usually those who used to vend in public spaces before.

Therefore, bazrobas had dissatisfied sellers who considered going back to street vending. From the sellers' viewpoint, why would they pay rent if they could return to the streets to vend? The inability to control the prices of products and losing customers and sellers caused problems for bazaar administrators as well: why would they keep renting the place (from the owners of the land) if the sellers would leave?

Thus, tolerating public vending decreased the demand for stalls. Consequentially, the less the demand, the lower the price per stall (or the other way around, the stricter the prohibition of

[24] After the war there were even conversations about initiatives that would prohibit turning on Russian songs in restaurants in Georgia.
[25] For example, one of the large markets had around 6000 shops in 2017, Rudaz (2020).

vending, the higher the demand, the higher the price).[26] All of this, in the end, lead up to and connected with the value of land and market of private property. The decrease in the real estate value was the issue of the state that, as I have demonstrated, had worked hard to create and then increase the value of the urban land.

Going back to the painters, as it became clear, they were never a competition to the private bazaars and marketplaces. A dozen of public vendors were not a real issue to the state either. What is more, the prohibition of public vending has never been fully implemented in Georgia. The vending was tolerated as long as the vendors sporadically showed up and sold objects different from the ones sold in the private marketplaces (for example, Matryoshkas). As Polanyi has argued, the state and its coercive powers create and maintain the market since it needs "control, regulation and intervention" (Polanyi 2001, 147).

As I have shown, by looking at the Dry Bridge Flea Market from its emergence until its dissolution, the questions of value and importance come to light in different yet interconnected ways. The market was of no importance to the state that saw value in the land; on the contrary, the market and the vendors were seen as impediments. In what comes next, I show how the Dry Bridge Flea Market takes shape in its contemporary form.

[26] Regulation was not even considered by Saakashvili's government that pursued "radical deregulation of the economy" (Gugushvili 2017, 3).

Chapter 2. Commodification, Tourism, Entrepreneurship (2008 - today)

"We are not street vendors anymore; this is a business," Giorgi, the seller who has been at the market for over 25 years tells me. With this, he delineates himself and the Dry Bridge Market sellers from other informal street vendors that still sell in different parts of the city today. In what comes next, I show the post-2008 shift after which the vendors perceive themselves as entrepreneurs, and the Dry Bridge turns from the means of survival and competition of private markets to a lucrative opportunity for commodification. The tourism industry is central to this transition.

2.1. Undiscovered and Unique: Tourism as the Fastest Growing Industry

2008 was critical for the former Dry Bridge Street vendors on multiple scales. First, the Dry Bridge Flea Market sellers were expelled from their former location in early 2008. The police chased them away from public spaces for months. Then, in August 2008, the Russo-Georgian war shook the country. For a few months in summer, the area was almost empty.

In late 2008, the Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors started settling on the sidewalks of the streets around their former place of commerce. The next few years, discussions about where the market would be located, how it would look and what could be sold were the topics of conversation between the vendors and the state.[27] So what changed? Starting roughly this period, the Dry Bridge Flea Market sellers began actively separating themselves from other street vendors. As the vendors have told me, the conversation became possible in the first place since the vendors

[27] For a brief moment in time, the vendors were asked to move down into the Mother Tongue Park, across the river where the state built them stalls to sell things. As the vendors say, it did not work since the people would not really go all the way down into the park to walk around the flea market. A visitor can still see the leftover boxes along the right bank of the river in the park.

had a strong argument on their side: similar flea markets also existed in *other* European cities and were they allowed to stay there, they could attract tourists and foreign visitors.

It was a perfect time for such a statement: the period largely coincided with the time when Georgia as a country was putting high hopes in developing the international tourism industry. At the same time, Saakashvili's government was actively working on portraying Georgia as part of the ancient European civilization (see Frederiksen 2012).[28] Therefore, the market gained a new value for the state and became a new arena for commodification and value extraction.

Georgia's industry-based economy switched to a "new tourism-focused and experience-based economy" (Gogishvili and Harris-Brandts 2020, 2006).[29] The trend significantly intensified after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the global economic crisis; tourism began to be seen as the industry that would "help the country quickly overcome economic decline". [30] As noted by the president and people in his administration at the time, the goal in particular was to increase the number of Western tourists in the country.[31]

Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) founded in 2006, started to take active steps towards making Georgia attractive to international visitors. It took on the mission to develop tourism that would "significantly contribute to the national economy" by showcasing "Georgia as an undiscovered unique travel destination" (see GNTA official website).[32] GNTA started to underscore Georgia's significance as the bridge between Europe and Asia as well as the country's historical location on the Silk Road - "the world's largest commercial artery." Through

[28] As Frederiksen (2012) writes, Saakashvili aimed to prove that Georgia was part of the European family. Also see Maisuradze 2018 (in Georgian) who writes that the Argonauts myth and the re-creation of St. George as the national symbol were attempts by the Saakashvili's government to prove Georgia's rightful spot in the ancient European civilization.

[29] This was a country-wide process. In 2010, A Free Tourism Zone was established and as Timm (2013) writes it meant that the "Investors who made an investment of at least GEL 1 million ($562,000) in Kobuleti on the Black Sea coast were exempted from profit and property taxes for 15 years" (22).

[30] Sakevarishvili, Revaz. "Expensiveness of Georgian Tourism." *Radio Free Liberty*, July 30, 2010. https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/2113839.html (In Georgian).

[31] See the speech given by Saakashvili visiting an International Tourist Center in Tbilisi in Georgian: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jef-2AaQ0JM.

[32] https://gnta.ge/

this, Georgia emerged as ancient yet full of still-to-be-made discoveries and surprises (GNTA official website).

Over the years, despite the change of the government in 2012, the tourism sector remained a top priority for the country (Khokhobaia 2015) and has been perceived as one of the fastest-growing industries (Todua 2017). If in 2003, only around 100,000 people visited Georgia, the number of international travelers reached 8.7 million in 2018, according to the GNTA report (Aliyev and Ahmadova 2020).[33] Based on the Geostat and National Bank of Georgia data "tourism revenues to GDP was 21.6% in 2019, out of which 18.7% is international tourism revenues" (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) 2021).

Amidst rebranding and marketing of Georgia, Tbilisi, the capital, and the largest city, emerged as the central hotspot for international visitors to arrive and explore. The first decade of the 21st century was "when the city was slowly starting to think about its promotion and branding" (Gogishvili and Harris-Brants 2020, 2006). In this, Tbilisi was also similar to other cities participating in neoliberal restructuring and in inter- and intra-urban competition (González 2006; Jessop and Sum 2000; Hall and Hubbard 1998; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009). Although, I argue Tbilisi's restructuring had a distinctive feature that the Dry Bridge Flea Market exemplifies.

People travelling with Georgian Airways in the Fall of 2015 could read the following description of the Dry Bridge market in the in-flight magazine:

> Tbilisi's most well-known bridge [that] never lacks visitors, because it is located next to the biggest and most famous flea market, which has ancient, rare but nevertheless cheap objects… This is why visitors never pass through this place without looking around (Tevzadze 2015).

After catching the readers' attention, the authors write about the Italian architect who designed the bridge. They note that "the small street … renamed as "Italy Street" in 2006" is also nearby. The short description of the bridge and the market embodies all the significant

[33] According to the GIZ report from 2021: "tourism is one of the top priority sectors of the national economy and one of the fastest-growing industries in Georgia" (GIZ report), with a particular importance to international tourism.

characteristics of the city and the country that GNTA wishes to promote. Georgia is part of the European civilization and Tbilisi is a European capital; it is an ancient country but also has rare and special features (that are not found in Europe), and it is cheap (cheaper than European capitals).

Digging into the past to 'enrich' places and objects, Boltanski and Esquerre argue (2020), is a distinctive feature of late capitalism which they call economy of enrichment. According to the authors, the economy of enrichment is a particular but widely applicable phenomenon: things are made unique and valuable in relation to the past, and by this relation, not only the price of things but future interest in them is secured. The economy of enrichment becomes especially helpful to the analysis, when looking at Georgia's transition from an industry-based to tourism-based economy and thinking about value. As Boltanski and Esquerre (2016) point out, tourism is "a central activity in the economy of enrichment" (72) in which past legacy and uniqueness are both embedded in the act of enriching something in close reference to the past. Looking at the Dry Bridge Flea Market through the enrichment actions of the Georgian Tourism Administration, points to the bigger transformation that goes beyond a single market or a place, that Georgia itself is a small example of.

Going back to Tbilisi, and in 2007, a vice mayor of Tbilisi said: "Today, our goal is to turn tourism into a real product that … will bring us millions of visitors and a large cash flow."[34] What makes the case of Georgia, and consequentially Tbilisi, interesting is that enriching and valuing of it by reference to the past is coupled with the double movement of, on the one hand, 'othering' of Georgia (as unique and ancient) while, on the other, situating it as part of the European civilization. The Dry Bridge Flea Market perfectly fit(s) this double dichotomy of enrichment - it is a flea market similar to the ones in 'other European cities', and a place with special and rare objects.

[34] Mchedlidze, Kakha, "How should Tbilisi develop in the next 20 years?" *Radio Free Liberty*, October 5, 2007. https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1554671.html (In Georgian).

The answer to the question that I raised in the beginning of this section is to be found in the state's and the city's perception of value. What changed is that the state started seeing the market valuable because of its enrichment potential. But this value did not substitute the other - as I will show in the next section, tourism attraction value and real estate value need not be an either/or and the city government finds a way to combine the two.

2.2. Re-Development and Attraction: Tbilisi Development Fund

In order to become a famous tourist destination, the city had first to revive its historical city center (like other European capitals). The New Life for Old Tbilisi was the first government-led project in the old town.[35] Starting with this project, the city's historical parts were seen to generate value in two ways: by attracting tourists on the one hand and by drawing investments on the other. This way of looking at Tbilisi's historical center was later taken up by the Tbilisi Development Fund (TDF), a new entity within the Town Hall administration founded in 2010. TDF found a particular interest in the Dry Bridge area.

Tbilisi Development Fund[36] was founded to operate under the Tbilisi City Hall. Since 2010, it is fully funded by the state budget. Overall, the goal of the Fund was and still is the "preservation of the historical appearance of Tbilisi and support of real estate value growth" through "rehabilitation of large areas in old Tbilisi, in order to connect and smoothen the big tourist route"

[35] In contrast to the fragmentary gentrification process of the 1990s in post-Soviet cities, the gentrification process in Tbilisi was policy led and was actively encouraged by the government (Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016). Deregulation of the market and giving out construction permits (Rekhviashvili 2015a) also went hand-in-hand with urban regeneration projects. The project, the New Life for Old Tbilisi, had a rather complicated scheme: the residents from the historical old town were displaced from their homes to the newly finished housing blocks in other parts of the city. The vacated lands were then up for grabs by the development companies (for more details see (Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016).

[36] I approach TDF as the expression of the state actions for two major reasons: First and foremost since the independence period Tbilisi never had a separate urban politics - as the capital it was the main playground for power and control. This especially intensified in the mid 2000s when "the consolidation of the state power […] put national government as a major player in urban development" (Salukvadze, Golubchikov 2016, 53). Today, the second most important and influential person in the ruling Georgian Dream Party is the mayor of the city.

(TDF document about its mission and goals)[37]. 'Supporting the increase of the real estate value' happens through renovating and restoring historical heritage buildings and monuments that "create additional centers of attraction" (TDF). In simple words, renovating the central parts of the city generates value - makes it attractive to tourists which also overlaps with the country's broader goals. More tourists mean more foreign capital inflow as well as more demand on the value of the land around the routes.

For the first two years of its existence, TDF led renovation projects of the Historical Old City and the Agmashenebeli Avenue (see the map below).[38] In 2012, under the new party and the new mayor, TDF had a novel and complicated task to accomplish; it had to draw a tourist route that would connect these two renovated areas to one another: "So, the issue was, there was no link between these two places, i.e., if a tourist accidentally came across Agmashenebeli avenue, they would get lost and never find their way to the old city" (personal interview with the head of the PR at TDF). Consequentially, a very large part of Tbilisi fell under the tag of "historical city" and, therefore, in need of renovation. The project was called New Tiflis and it would serve to create exactly this link. The Dry Bridge Flea Market area was envisioned to be a connector of these two parts of the city.

[37] The website of the Fund has been under construction since 2020 and there are not many sources of getting access to the information about the Fund or its administered projects. The document was provided to me by the head of the public relations department of TDF.

[38] In those tso years, even though the Fund was created to take charge of the 'development' of the city, it oversaw the renovations of Mestia in Svaneti and Signaghi in Kakheti. The two regions in the east and west of Georgia were renovated to attract tourists.

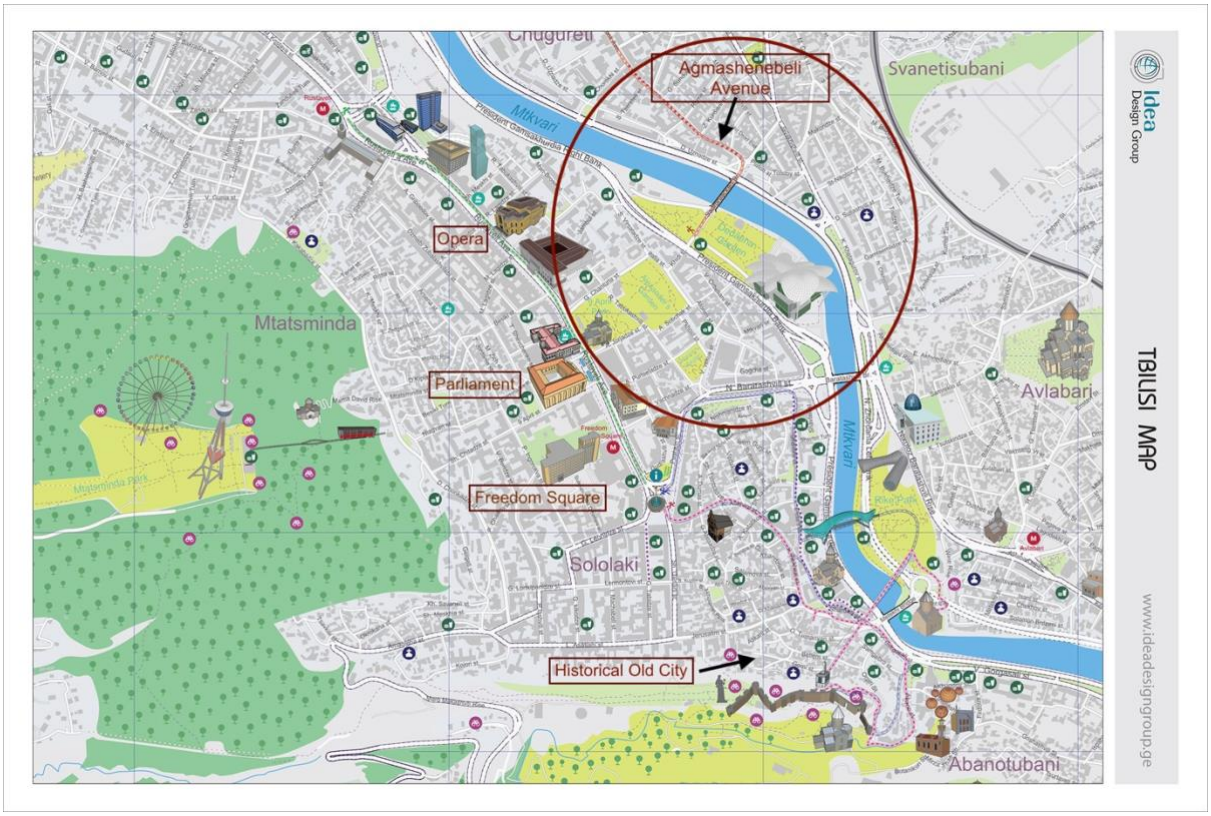

Fig. 11. The same map as in Fig. 1. Plus some additional annotations for popular tourist spots. I drew a larger circle to demonstrate roughly the area of new focus of New Tiflis. The person (originally part of the map) is about to cross the Saarbrucken Bridge.

In order to achieve the goals of the New Tiflis project, TDF hired Colliers International Georgia. This international development company provides real estate services and investment management to its clients.[39] Colliers's mission was to understand and analyze the broader development potential of the left bank of the river (across the river from the market), taking into consideration economic and real estate factors and proposing the best possible strategy of moving forward (Colliers International Georgia 2017). In total, the company prepared six reports. Their suggestions start from small-scale redevelopment plans of houses, parks, and streets and finish with identifying lands with the highest development potential, including the recommendations for areas where large hotels could be built. It is not in the scope of this research to delve into all six reports and how this giant development company and the town hall plan to redevelop a massive

[39] See Colliers International Georgia website: https://www.colliers.com/en-ge

chunk of the city's left bank. However, it is significant to underscore that the market area is the backbone of the development of the left bank because it serves as the connector to the Historic Old City. Therefore, in 2017 the preparations for the renovation of the Dry and Saartsbrücken bridges and the two parks around began.

Part of the preparation process was outlining issues and problems in the market and thinking of ways to solve them. According to the fund, they conducted an oral survey and questioned the Flea Market vendors about their issues in the area. Based on the results, they compiled a document - *Rehabilitation-Adaptation of Dry Bridge (March 9 and Dedaena Gardens)* (Tbilisi Development Fund 2018).[40]

The issues outlined in the document ranged from "incivility" of the vending carried out by the traders (TDF actively refers to them as 'traders'), to "sanitary issues" due to the non-existence of toilets. "Impaired movement of tourists and pedestrians on the sidewalks" due to the goods on display on the floor and "faceless storage spaces" were reiterated as crucial "issues" listed as bullet points in the "problems" section of the document. The excuses that were given in the early 2000s regarding the restriction of street vending were rearticulated by the TDF as mere 'problems' to the city governance. A decades later, the city no longer planned to prohibit public vending, but rather to "rehabilitate" the area. For every "problem" in the file, how this problem impeded tourist movement in the area was specified. TDF offered solutions to every one of these issues.[41]

In an interview, the TDF representative told me that they 'tolerate' the presence of the vendors because "It's the face of the city and they've been here for years, it's like a part of the city, and that's the part you can't touch." Here the stark commodification of the market becomes visible through the logic of the state. The flea market is an objectified 'part' of the city that has great

[40] As I have mentioned before, Dry Bridge is the common way people reference the market. The document I mention here is a word file, without a title or date. It is the information that was presented on the website and two years ago (as I have personal notes from that website, and it directly matches the text provided in the word file). The TDF representative sent the document to me after our interview.

[41] For example, they planned to spare a place for the currency exchange booth in the area, so that in case the tourists would want to buy "old things" they do not leave the area because they do not have money in a Georgian currency.

attraction potential. Renovating the area would generate this potential. On the other hand, vendors are seen as impeding the realization of this potential. The fact that the vendors have created this market and are the ones who attract tourists is absent from the rhetoric of TDF. They create "issues" and "problems" that must be solved. Not only do the Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors impede the realization of the potential of the area, but they also hinder the smooth running of renovations. As the TDF representative told me:

> When we were renovating the streets, we verbally agreed and promised that they would temporarily move to a different area. They were afraid, and we barely managed to keep them away, because they thought we were kicking them out. Occasionally, during renovations, they would come back up and remind us of our verbal agreement (personal interview).

Through this relationship, the sellers at the market were again reminded of their informality or illegality. The fact that the agreement was only verbal also was a source of insecurity for many. Who knew what the state would end up doing to our place of work? - the vendors remember when talking about the rehabilitation period.

2.3 This is a Business: Tourists Generating Value

A visitor coming to the market today will notice that the default language that the sellers at the market use to "shout" to the passersby is Russian. For many vendors, Russian is the only foreign language they speak and understand; therefore, they use it to communicate with those who, they assume, do not speak Georgian. Others, who speak English and German, decide which language to use based on the customers' looks. Still, if you are walking through the market and looking around with some interest, you will most often not be spoken to in Georgian. Again, the assumption is that most of the customers in the market are not Georgians.

Sitting in his car parked behind his stall, with the door open and one leg outside, Zurab, agreed to answer my question about the market's history. Although he hasn't been at the market since its start, he told me proudly: "I can tell you one thing. 20% of the tourists come to Tbilisi to

shop at the Dry Bridge. We bring these people to Georgia. […] it is because this place is famous, people take photos, post them on the internet, and then more people come here to see what this market is all about."

Almost any tourist guide or blog about what to see in Tbilisi will mention the Dry Bridge Flea Market as the place to visit (Wanderlush, TripAdvisor, Tbilisi Local Guide, etc.).[42] On TripAdvisor, for example, the market is ranked as number 30 out of 250 things to do in Tbilisi. The general agreement seems that the market is a great place to 'explore' Georgian and Soviet past and culture.

Zurab is one of many for whom a large flow of tourists at the market is a source of pride. For the vendors at the market, the fact that the Dry Bridge market is a famous destination and is well-known justifies their many years of work. Tourists are attracted to Stalin's posters and old Soviet medals; therefore, the vendors accommodate tourists' interests (see images below). On a day-to-day basis, the sellers renew their stalls with objects that would appeal to the tourists. They sit or stand behind their stalls and engage with the visitors.

Fig. 12. Photo from Wunderlush.

Fig. 13. Photo from Tbilisi City Guide.

[42] See Lush, Emily (2023). *Tips for Visiting the Dry Bridge Market, Tbilisi's Famous Flea Market,* Wanderlush, https://wander-lush.org/dry-bridge-market-tbilisi-flea-market/ or Dry Bridge Flea Market on Trip Advisor, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g294195-d6426434-Reviews-Flea_Market_Dry_Bridge-Tbilisi.html (Both Accessed on 01.06.2023).

So when Giorgi tells me that the Dry Bridge Flea Market is a business, Giorgi opposes his work to street vending. The opposition is deeply embedded in the question of value and importance.

As I have argued, 2008 was a significant shift in the Dry Bridge Flea Market operations. However, rather than an abrupt shift it was a transformation of the market from illegal vending to a business that attracts tourists and generates value. So when Giorgi says they are no longer street vendors, he means that they are no longer illegal workers who do not pay taxes and therefore hurt the economy and society. Instead, they conduct business that attracts tourists who are of value to the city and the country. The switch in transition is also echoed in the article from 2009, where the journalist writes: "Selling second-hand things has become a business for many since foreign visitors have started to take an interest in the objects on bazroba" (Tukhiashvili 2009a). From a journalist's perspective visiting the second-hand market post-2008, the sellers were no longer street vendors. Instead, they were businesspeople because foreign visitors (and not simply locals) took an interest in their products.[43] The shift from vending to conducting business is one way in which the importance of the actions of the vendors become real to them (Graeber 2001). They became real to them because their labor is realized in a socially recognized form - tourism.

In this section, I argue that 2008 was a crucial year. The global financial crisis, coupled with the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, took a massive toll on the Georgian economy. The National Movement Party, and the Georgian Dream Party after it, saw international tourism as a big hope. It is here that the market gained value as an attraction site. This is what I call the commodification of the market: when the market, a collective of informal economic actors and a problem to the liberal state, starts to be seen as having a life and value of its own. Meanwhile, the fact that the vendors are the primary producers of the market seems to be obscured.

[43] This demonstrates a broader dynamic in Georgia. Things, places, people gaining value and significance because they get acknowledgment from the outside.

On the one hand, for the TDF, the vendors are 'part of the city' and 'part' of the market and not the creators of it. They are a 'problem' that must be fixed in order for the market to become an attraction site. On the other hand, even if the state is a constant reminder for the vendors of their informality and insecurity, the fact that the state does not prohibit their vending is also proof of the vendors' value. The vendors negotiate and remind the state of their existence despite fearing being kicked out. So, the market's existence is a testimony to the value of the market and the vendors' actions. The importance that comes from tourist flow is demonstrative of the production of value that is not economic per se. Tourists are not the primary source of income for the Dry Bridge vendors.

Chapter 3. Value of the Market and Market Value of the Objects

As mentioned in the introduction, the importance and unimportance of the market are part of the everyday conversations at the Dry Bridge. I have demonstrated in the section above how tourism brings importance to the vendors and generates the market's value. Tourism makes the market valuable to the state and the city's governance. It also becomes a primary source of pride for the vendors. In what follows, I return to thinking about the seeming 'unimportance' of the market. Why do the vendors at the market undervalue the Dry Bridge and the objects sold there? I argue that the ostensibly contradictory portrayal of the 'unimportance' of the market contributes to the production of the value of the market and connects to the broader processes of value extraction. I show this in the first two sections. In the last two parts of the chapter, I show the self-protective mechanisms the vendors have devised in response to the value extraction and how these mechanisms often end up putting the vendors into other exploitative relationships. I also briefly discuss how the market's value directly influences the objects' value, often favoring the vendors.

3.1. Barakholka: Undervaluing the Market

"We were once asked to use check machines here [in 2006] - what receipt, which receipt, people bring things from home here; we bought those machines but could not use them. We sold them back. This is not a store; this is Barakholka, we take things for "posle"[44] from people's homes," - says Nino when remembering the history of the market.

"Barakholka" is a Georgianized version of the Russian word Baraholka that translates to the "flea market" in English. Barahlo is of common Slavic root and describes personal, used and/or old objects that are useless and often useless to the extent that they become junk. People

[44] Posle is a Russian word for 'later.' Taking things for 'posle' means taking things and paying for them later. In this case it means the vendors take the objects from people and only give them money once (if) they sell the object.

at the market use the Georgian version, with a strong accent on 'kh', to refer to their place of work. The more often one calls an object Barakhlo, the more use-less the object becomes.

Throughout my time at the market, I heard the vendors use the words Barakholka and Barakhlo in reference to the market and the objects sold there. Why would the sellers at the market, who work so hard every day to prove the importance and value of the market, refer to it as Barakholka? How is it that the objects that the vendors take such a great care of, pack and unpack daily from boxes and layers of paper wraps become Barakhlo? Or that they transform from businesspeople to "those who sell Barakhlos?

The market converts from an important place to 'Barakholka' when the vendors relate to or remember the state and its actions towards formalizing, privatizing, or preventing street vending at the Dry Bridge. As Nino says in the quote above, asking them to use cash registers was nonsensical since the Dry Bridge market is not a store. The vendors do not even own most of the things they sell. Most of the objects they sell come from people's homes. As every single person at the market will be fast to tell you, not only are they a Barakholka, but they barely make ends meet through the income from the market. Partly, the story is true; many people make little to no money from one day to another. However, as Jano, the stall-less regular at the market[45] tells me, "Everyone here pretends like they do not make much money, but some of these people you see here make decent money. One of them just purchased an expensive flat in Tbilisi. They are just trying to stay under the radar."

In the simplest terms, the radar for the Dry Bridge Flea Market vendors (as for many informal actors) is the state and, by extension, the private bazrobas and influential business owners. Since the sellers do not have a legal right to vend, the constant sense and anticipation of eviction accompany their everyday work. I have been told that the state officials might decide to close down the market any day, and that very day, they might require the vendors to go inside the private

[45] I will talk about the stall-less regulars on the next page. It would suffice to say here that these people are part of the market and sell things there as well though they do not have stalls, often because they choose not to (and not because they could not get a stall).

marketplaces to rent stalls. While some of them cannot afford to do so, many (or, as Jano tells me, most of them) could. Staying under the radar for the vendors at the market, first and foremost, means always acting like they can't afford. But the story does not end here.

The second, and as I would like to argue, the larger reason why the sellers choose to undervalue the market and the objects sold there, connects to the particular customers who want to visit the flea market and Barakholka. These customers are attracted to the market because it's a place of undervalued objects. Thus, "unimportance" is key to attracting them.

Walking around a flea market and wishing to find something special for very little money is a common consumer experience. Consumer literature has explored the phenomenon of the "thrill of the hunt" (Bardhi 2003) as characteristics of thrifting and the pride and satisfaction that comes after a rare find (Sherry 1990). As a consumer and a tourist, I have travelled to a foreign, and especially cheaper country (from Austria) and have thought: 'What if what is valuable 'here' is not (or not 'yet') valued 'there' and I can get it for much less money. I believe, the thrill and the hunt combined with geography (i.e. travelling to cheaper countries and then buying cheaper things) partly explains the attraction to the Dry Bridge Flea Market (together with, as already outlined above, seeing Georgian past and culture, etc.).

3.2. Who Buys Valuables?

As one walks around the market, it is difficult not to notice that next to small and light souvenirs, one can find huge Samovars and chandeliers, vases and plates, big old sords, or large clay pots on display at the market. So, who buys these things? As I came to understand after spending some time at the Dry Bridge, for the sellers at the market, tourists, wealthy Russians and foreigners are separate categories of customers. When the vendors at the market talk about tourists, they often refer to the people who love to walk around the market, look at the objects with interest, take one or two photos and leave. These 'tourists' come to the market because it's a flea market, they

generate the value of the market, but most of these people leave without spending much money there. Travelling around with one backpack, „Tourists will come and maybe buy one cup or a glass as a souvenir, that is about it," says Manana. The wealthy Russians and 'foreigners' [Utskhoelebi in Georgian],[46] on the other hand, are those who come to the market to purchase things.

Wealthy Russians are unequivocally the best customers in the market. Every vendor I talked to has told me that Russians are their most frequent and best buyers. „We lived with the hope of Russians who used to come here; they knew what's what, they knew the value of things," retells Manana when remembering the years before the Russian invasion of Ukraine when many Russian used to come to the market to purchase things. "We say we don't want Russians… well, Russians do not bargain, they just buy," Nino confirms Manana's statement, while unpacking plates and chandeliers from her bag.

In the category of foreigners, people from European countries dominate. The former ambassadors of various European countries are frequenters at the market. The stories of former ambassadors or 'important representatives of foreign countries' coming by and purchasing everything from cutlery to antiques are remembered with a sense of pride: "They buy so many things here when it is time for them to leave, they take these things to their countries and decorate their homes with them" explains Giorgi.

In an attempt to explain how the market works, Jano tells me: "If it seems to you that everyone is here to sell, well, actually everyone is here to find something valuable and get hold of it." Jano does not have a stall at the market or wants to have one. He comes here almost daily and hangs out with the vendors and other stall-less regulars, his friends. They all hang around in anticipation of stumbling upon something of worth. Local people, especially those in need, bring things from home. They walk around the market hoping to get one of the vendors to buy things

[46] There are two reasons for this separation. Firstly, it's a purely practical separation - Russians are simply the most common customers, therefore always talked about as a separate group. Although, for some of the vendors, there is a second reason. For the generation that grew up in the Soviet Union, foreigners are often still considered to be the people outside of the former borders of the Soviet Union. Although, Russians are also considered to be outside of Georgia, they are still delineated from the 'foreigner' category.

from them. I will talk in more detail about how the system works in the next chapter. Here, I would like to concentrate on the fact that even those who sell are on the lookout. They want to find and buy valuable things to be later able to sell them to the 'foreigners.' These so-called foreigners come to the flea market to uncover unique and particular objects for cheap.

I argue that what Jano describes, and what Russians and the so-called 'foreigners' participate in, is a much larger phenomenon that the above-described dynamic of the thrill and the hunt coupled with geographical direction is just part of. I argue that this thrill and hunt is particularly embedded in the ownership of specific objects and demonstrates the core-periphery relationship of value extraction. In thinking about and making sense of this phenomenon, Thompson's (2017 [1979]) book is extremely helpful.

Thompson (2017 [1979]), in his book *Rubbish Theory, The Creation and Destruction of Value*, traces the movement of objects from having zero value[47] to becoming valuable again and the social dynamics thereof. For Thompson, almost all objects are part of three categories: Transient, Rubbish and Durable. Some objects are always transient (e.g. used bedlinen), while others are always durable (e.g. a Van Gogh painting). The value of an object in the transient category constantly decreases until it reaches zero and becomes rubbish. While the opposite process can be observed in the category of durables; objects often become priceless (and e.g. ends up in a museum).[48]

It is "decidedly advantageous to own durable objects," writes Thompson, and argues that owning durable objects bring prestige and power. He describes the insatiable need for the middle classes to own durable objects and how they often get hold of rubbish that soon becomes durable. Middle classes, he writes, live in the culture of durables. Working classes, on the other hand, live

[47] Although Thompson does not directly define value in his book, value for him is not equivalent to the object's price. A price demonstrates or represents the object's value in the social order. The value of rubbish emerges prior to the price tag.

[48] As Thompson notes, some objects immediately become durable e.g. a painting of already famous artist. On the other hand, some objects are always transient e.g. an apple (due to its material composition). However, most of the objects are in-between. They become rubbish but could also become durable. Transfer from transient category to durables most often happens via rubbish.

in the culture of transience. When an object successfully transfers from being rubbish to durables, "their ownership is transferred from rag-and-bone man to the knowledgeable collector" (60). I think it is here, in focusing on the process and power dynamics of transfer, that Thompson's contribution becomes critical to the case of the market.[49] It is the need and desire to own 'durables' that bring certain people to the market and following the transfer reveals the broader dynamics at hand.

Zooming back on the market, I have been told by the vendors that one can notice whether there is a particularly difficult time in the country by the increased number of locals at the market. The locals come and bring things from home in hopes of selling them to the vendors. Many of these people are not entirely sure about the value of the objects they bring. Most of them need immediate income. The vendors, by the right to the stall they have acquired through the years, can profit from selling these objects to those who would like to own durables. This is a simplified story of a rather complicated system of operations.[50] Vendors might not be buying the objects from the locals, just exhibiting them on their stalls in the hopes of selling them. The buyers of the durables are also not always necessarily 'foreigners' either, though those dominate the current consumer market. What matters is, first of all, the need to sell and the need to own, the transfer of objects from those needing immediate income to the vendors and then to those in search of durables. Second of all, who are those in search of durables? As people at the market have told me, they are rich Russians and Europeans, otherwise "Who has the money here to buy things?!"[51]

When Thompson writes that the durables "are always in the hands of the most powerful," he does not simply refer to the people but to the broader dynamic of power and distribution thereof:

[49] I do not wish to argue that the objects locals bring from home are rubbish or that the foreigners who purchase them immediately transform them into durables. Though I think there is something to the dynamic that can be observed at the market.

[50] These locals do not necessarily bring things from home; they might be intermediaries between the vendors and the owners. Such a chain might extend much further.

[51] There are a lot of people 'here' who have money to buy things. Though, this phrase mostly shows that most of consumers are not from Georgia.

> When there is a shift in power, there is a shift in durables as well ….
> Witness the way in which American and German buyers have acquired
> much of Killarney …. and the fact that London Bridge, far from falling down,
> now spans a stagnant artificial lake in the middle of Arizona desert (41).

I would like to suggest that what happens at the Dry Bridge market is a small scale of a much larger process. The movement of potentially durable objects from people's homes to the market and into the hands of 'foreigners' for little money is a small but significant form of extraction. Georgia was part, and often a privileged part, of the largest country in the world. By looking at the market, we get a peek at Georgia's peripheralization post-1990s, the move of durables, and a form of extraction of value from the periphery to the core (Wallerstein 1974).[52] This extraction is especially amplified during the times of crisis:

> "For those who know anything about antiques, the Dry Bridge is the Klondike[53]
> - no one knows what you will find on the blankets laid out on the floor by an
> old granny. A German lady walked on the Dry Bridge for a whole year
> during the hard times in the 90s and now boasts with a collection of Maissen
> China in her native Swabia; the second lady bought the entire work of one and
> only Caspar David Friedrich" reads the post by the unknown creator of
> the Facebook profile called Dry Bridge.[54]

The intensified need for income during 'hard times' coincides with the most active transfer of durables. 'Hard times' are also the times when the market emerges (the 1990s) and then re-emerges (post-2008). The vendors at the market hint to something critical when they differentiate between the tourists and the Russians and foreigners. The former are a recent phenomenon; they arrive in the city and maybe stumble upon something cheap and nice at the flea market. The more important the market is and the more it is marketed, the more tourists will go there.[55] They are even quite susceptible to being tricked into buying an extremely cheap object for more money. The latter two, on the other hand, are a different category. If tourists are a recent phenomenon in Georgia, the

[52] The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: concepts for comparative analysis).
[53] A rich source of something
[54] The name in both Georgian and English. The post is from 2014.
[55] Except maybe more alternative tourists, who might still go to the market but not buy anything. These people would also be dissatisfied with the recent renovations and find the market less "authentic."

Russians and the so-called foreigners have been at the market since the early 90s. It is no co-occurrence that this coincides with Georgia's independence and the time when it is integrated into the market economy. The more Barakholka the market is, the more it hints at the undervalued stuff and the more it attracts the 'foreigners'.

In this way, by undervaluing the market, the vendors attract those who bring money to the market. As I will show in the following section, the market and the prices of objects within it largely operate against the recollection of the past that is embedded in the memory of being ripped off in the early 90s.

3.3. The Urban Myth about the Rembrandt Painting in the Market

> So, the thing is, this market started at the time when people had no idea what was hanging in their apartments and what the prices of the things they owned were. They brought things out on this market and put them on the floor, hoping to sell them. Once they would sell them, it would turn out that something very valuable was sold here for very cheap (Jano).

On the descriptive level, people were well aware that they sold chairs, Samovars, chandeliers or crockery. What the people did not know, and what Jano refers to here, is related to the market value of the objects. The following story that I heard over and over again at the market embodies all these experiences. In the 1990s, the story goes, a Rembrandt (sometimes Van Gogh) painting was sold at the market for very little money. A man brought the painting to the market, thinking it was just another object hanging in his parents' apartment from which he could make a little money. The vendor put it on his stall without knowing what it really was, and someone bought it very cheaply. The assumption is that that 'someone' was not Georgian since the story usually ends with a phrase (or a version of it): 'Nothing valuable is left in this country anymore'.

This urban myth is key to understanding the work of the people at the market today. To guide my understanding of the myth and its role in the market, I turned to Terence Turner (2017) and his analysis of Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire. I refer to Turner's analysis first

because it is a detailed analysis of a single myth (as compared to a common structuralist approach to analyzing many myths). Although the myth of the sold painting is not the *origin* myth of the market per se, it dates back to the beginnings of the market and serves as the form of a reference to the everyday processes today.[56] Second of all, as Turner delineates himself from the structuralist (Levy-Straussian) analysis of myths, he argues "that myths have a "practical function" that "directly links" them with social reality. This function is that of shaping the patterns of feelings and behavior of "subjects," defined as stereotypic categories of social actors, towards the socio-economic system that forms their collective arena of action (144-145)."[57] I do not intend to come close to thinking of the myth at the market on the same scale and with the same power of analysis as done by Turner, though I think it is fundamental to understand "the meanings the myth have to those who actually tell and listen to them" (5).

As retold to a potential customer, the myth of the sold painting underscores the importance of the market again: (extremely) valuable and durable objects are sold there cheaply. As retold to me, a person from Georgia, the myth creates as a shared feeling of a rip-off - everything valuable has been taken out of the country. However, the myth primarily circulates in the market among the vendors and, I argue, has an essential function for them.

I highly doubt anyone at the market believes an actual Rembrandt painting was ever sold there. Despite this, the myth communicates the frustration and a sense of 'being fooled' that the vendor who sold the painting would have felt after finding out the paintings' value. It also makes the listener (the vendor) think about that 'someone' who purchased it for almost nothing. Through this, it recreates the commonly held assumption at the market that everything valuable has been taken by the 'foreigners' (even if, as I have mentioned, not all the buyers of durables are necessarily

[56] Turner argues that the cooking of fire myth of how society emerged is the highest level of the social organization that the Kayapo society refers to. In a way, the painting myth is the extreme version of the rip-off, as nothing more valuable than a Rembrandt painting would ever arrive or be sold at the market.

[57] All the words in quotation marks are from Levy Strauss who argues that myths too have a "practical function" and that they are not "directly linked" with social reality (see Turner 2008, 144).

foreigners). There are two levels in the myth (to use Turner's words), and they are both key to the flea market vendors. Simply put, the broader socio-economic system is the highest level: while vendors are there to sell things, the upper classes come to the market and want to buy things cheaply. Often these people are not from Georgia, are attracted to the flea market; they buy things and take them abroad.

Nevertheless, this does not mean the vendors can do nothing about it. The second and practical level is that which the vendors can in some way influence: to 'know' what they put on their stalls to sell. In this way, this myth has a "practical function" and is "directly linked" to how people at the market act today. It functions as a myth against and through which old and new vendors at the market perform their transactions today and is directly related to value - to knowing the value of objects. The vendors at the market today have created systems of assessment that apply to potentially valuable objects. So that this way, in a close reference to the past, a very valuable thing will not be sold for little to no money at the market anymore.

3.4. The Stall-less Regulars as a Defense Mechanism

The first two people I met at the market were Gia and Jano, neither of whom have a stall at the market. Partly, I was redirected to them because they had time to talk to me and answer all my questions since they do not have a stall and do not interact with the tourists. More importantly, Gia and Jano, and as I found out later a few other stall-less regulars, all men, have the most profound knowledge of the market as a totality and of the objects sold there. Since they are not bound to a stall, they are mobile, which explains their familiarity with the objects at the Dry Bridge. People who sell at the one end of Bridge Street might not encounter or talk to those who sell at the other end of Nameless Street for days or even weeks.

As I have come to understand, the stall-less regulars have particular fields of interest and expertise. Some are numismatists with a deep knowledge of coins and other currency units; others know quite a lot about old weapons and knives and even specialize in objects from specific historical periods. However, they all have a general knowledge allowing them to recognize old and valuable crockery, furniture, or other objects. They also often know which valuable objects arrive and leave the market and for how much (as their interests do not lie in cheap souvenir purchases).

Partly, these stall-less regulars' knowledge comes from the experience they have acquired at the market. Some of them came as protectors to their female members of the family in the 1990s and have gained knowledge about the objects throughout. Most were driven to the market because of their interest in antique and rare objects. Over the years, they have created their networks of colleagues and friends and have remained in the market.

The stall-less regulars are in-between the two cultures that the vendors navigate. They own some durable objects and know to recognize them. Some of them are small-size collectors. They are part of the market and sell objects as their primary source of income.

The stall-less regulars have an important function: they assess the value of the objects brought to the market by people that the vendors are about to sell. Most of the vendors at the market do not own the objects they sell. They have their network of how they acquire objects. "Relatives, friends, friends of friends, they know we are here, so they bring us things, and if we manage to sell them, we give them a share of the money," explains Nino. Many people bring things to earn money; some bring objects they no longer need or want to get rid of. One way or the other, an object often arrives at the market and is, in Thompson's vocabulary, either a transient object (that decreases in value over time) or rubbish (close to having no value); either way, it has no set price. Often the vendors, through the years of experience, can estimate the worth of the objects or how much they could be sold. If an object looks unfamiliar and/or valuable, the vendors ask the stall-less regulars to step in. The stall-less regulars look at the object and ask questions about its origins and the material that it is made of. After careful assessment and observation, they express

their opinion about the value of the object and the minimum recommended price. The stall-less regulars ensure the already 'durable' objects are recognized and priced accordingly. In rare but fortunate cases, they might discover and transform a close-to-rubbish object into a durable one.[58]

So it is in 'knowing' and recognizing that the ultimate function of the stall-less regulars lies.[59] As Thompson (2917 [1979]) also writes, those in the culture of durables have "control over time and space […which] is secured by gaining control over knowledge" (66). In this case, the stall-less have secured control over knowledge at the market. Therefore, their power does not simply lie in their knowledge; it is in recognition of their knowledge at the market and by the other vendors. During customers transactions some form of control is also transferred to the sellers. The sellers know the value of the objects and refuse to be ripped off - they make sure never to make the mistake of selling something precious for very cheap again.

"They take care of me," Nino tells me, "They are all my friends; we work collectively." The assessment work of the stall-less regulars is considered a friendly gesture, a favor. However, favors often need reciprocation. In owing reciprocation, the vendors sometimes find themselves in other forms of exploitative relationships.

An object is sometimes sold for much more than the vendor, or the owner initially thought. These situations are a rare opportunity for the vendors to make a significant profit: they still give the approximate amount that they promised to the owner of the object while the rest goes into their pockets. In some way, the chance of an unexpected profit is balanced with unpredicted damages: objects break when transported from home or storage spaces or while unpacking; some

[58] I do not know what happens in those cases and how the money would be redistributed later on.

[59] I intentionally do not label these people as brokers (Lindquist 2015; Stovel and Shaw 2012; Bierschenk 2021). Although there are some important features that Jano and Gia share with brokers, there are many in which they defer. One important feature of brokers as identified by Jeremy Boisevain, is that brokers do not directly control the resources (Stovel and Shaw 2012). While it is partly the case with the stall-less regulars, they also use their favors as consultants to sell the 'durables' that they own. Neither are Jano and Gia independent "third party" (which brokers usually are). As Stovel and Shaw (2012) argue "brokerage is one of a small number of mechanisms by which disconnected or isolated individuals (or groups) can interact economically, politically, and socially" (139) - this is also not the case with consultants. Though as I will show exploitation is partly the case in the relations of the so-called consultants and vendors, which is also often outlined in the case of brokers (Stovel and Shaw 2012).

even get stolen. In these situations, the vendors take full responsibility for the risks - they pay the agreed price to the owners.

In the case of the stall-less regulars, these situations are somewhat different. Since the regulars do not themselves sell anything, they do not take risks. They give out favors; therefore, they also expect the vendors to sell things in return. When the stall-less regulars bring an object, they dictate the price it needs to be sold for. By lingering at the market they ensure that the whole sum is theirs if the object is sold for more. The vendors get a tip in the form of a 'present'. And it is upon the stall-less regulars' goodwill how much the tip will be. In this way, the mechanisms that protect the vendors from rip-offs are also the ones that often put them in exploitative relationships with those who hold some form of "knowledge".

Despite or through this, the consultants and vendors work together and create the market. They actively participate in the production of the value of the market and in making sure it is a place that generates tourist flow and Russian and 'foreigner' customers. It is in this that another, more wide-ranging function of the myth lies: in making sure that the market that is *the place* where the myth takes place *exists*. By the value of being a flea market that sells durables, this market also influences how objects are seen.

As I have discovered, most valuable objects are not on display at the market. They are hidden away, awaiting the customer who will be willing to pay the price for them. Many objects on the stalls in the market are not second-hand or antique. Some are new, store-bought but masked as old by virtue of being placed at the Barakholka market. Among lots of old-looking objects, to the naked eye, it is hard to delineate new from old and expensive from cheap.

Even more interestingly, many objects in the market are brought from abroad. One or two Saturdays a month, cars full of crockery and cutlery arrive to Nameless Street early in the morning. As I have been told by the vendors, the drivers of the cars, mostly Tatars, bring cars for resale from Germany. Engaging in a double business, they fill their cars with cutlery and crockery. Often, the vendors at the market purchase objects from these people as well. Nothing valuable comes

from them, Nino tells me, since "over there, people get rid of things that they do not need; while here, it is the other way around." Still, she says, sometimes she will buy things and resell them to the tourists here.

While generating the value at the market, the tourists are also susceptible to being ripped off. Due to the title of the market as a treasure of second-hand finds, many objects at the market might seem of some value. For example, Stalin's posters sold at the market are often newly printed; badges and medals are also often less old than claimed. In one sense, for a lot of vendors the pride that comes from ripping off the tourists is closely tied to the sense of being fooled by "the foreigners" in the past. In this way, they get back what they are owed.

A Rock in the Park: Concluding Thoughts

> It was a windy day, so one of the sellers, who usually spread his goods on a blanket on the ground, went to this park over here and found a small rock to put on one side of the blanket so that the blanket would not move too much. A couple of hours later, a tourist approached him, looked at the things he was selling and then asked, 'How much for this rock?' the vendor said, '10 Laris,' and the tourist bought it. …Imagine a rock from the park has been sold here. Everything has and can be sold here.

The anecdote about the rock was one of the first stories that Gia, the stall-less regular at the market, told me as to introduce me to the place and the other vendors. With a slight suspicion but a sense of pride, Gia chose this story to tell me a few things about the market that I should have known before going forward with my research: tourists are important to the people working there; they are also the ones that buy "unimportant" and not too valuable things. What's more, now speaking to me as a local, I (or, for that matter, any 'local') could bring almost anything here, and they (the people at the market) would find a way to sell it because the market is an important place. Because the market is an important place, rocks, or other unimportant things, gain value here. Thinking through the anecdote, I would like to go back to some broader points made throughout the thesis and to develop some new ones.

The objects are put on the market and gain value because the market is valuable. The market is valuable because of its location - in a city (city as the arena for capitalist accumulation) in a semi-peripheral country. The market was put *on the market* from a specific geographical location, and that matters.

The commodification of the market, or, in other words putting the market on the market is significant as it shows the usefulness of looking at value that cuts through levels and brings otherwise disparate points into single focus (Pederson 2008). Throughout the chapters, I analyzed the importance of the vendors' actions (Graeber 2001) and their relationship to and perception of the occupation as it changes over time. I showed how what is valuable and when is in an intricate connection with how people perceive themselves and their place of work.

Scaling up, I looked at how city politics and tourism are embedded in the broader country-wide and global dynamics. Through thinking about enrichment and the role of the past, I analyzed how the flea market is valued due to the broader processes in the late-stage capitalism where cultural and economic capital find new ways of feeding into each other. In the case of Georgia, the enrichment economy coupled with the specificity of Georgia's othering and Europeanizing is indeed an interesting dynamic that is worth exploring further.

Yet, since the market exists in the broader system of contradictions, it is not free from them. On the one hand, the vendors need the market to attract tourists because, for the state, tourists generate the market's value. On the other hand, the more tourists come to the market, the more the state pays attention to and commodifies the market, and the more 'polished' and similar the market becomes to the flea markets elsewhere. This, in turn, decreases the market's value for those who are attracted to it for its "unimportance." What complicates this picture further, I think, is the fact that the vendors gain some form of importance and a sense of pride from the tourists and from the interest that the tourists take in the market. Meanwhile, they often feel ripped off by the people who actually come in search of 'valuables', even if they are the ones who make the largest transactions. In the thesis, I showed how self-protective mechanisms against these people generate more exploitative relationships. Only time can tell what the future of the market and the vendors will be, as, after all, unsaid but constantly present is the logic of capital that hovers over and permeates and dictates the valuation process. Though, I would not like to end here.

I did not sufficiently explore the role of the locals who bring objects to the market to sell. I believe this to be a limitation of the thesis. These locals are deprived of the right to vend on the sidewalks of Bridge and Nameless Streets even though the pavements are public spaces. The vendors appropriate the common resource and restrict its broader commercial use and gain profit from this as well. The dynamic is interesting in and of itself.

Another point interconnected to local processes that I would like to raise before ending this thesis is extremely significant for me personally, as it relates to Georgian political, economic

and social life today. I want to problematize the point I develop in the last chapter, where I talk about foreigners and wealthy Russians as the main customers in the market. Although this is partly true and most likely the Russians and other 'foreigners' have accumulatively spent the most money at the market, the rich, upper-class Georgians comfortably hide behind this narrative, while their apartments are filled with antique and valuable objects that they have acquired in this and other markets over the years. I have added to their (our) hiding, partly by taking the statements and common conceptions at the market at their face value and not questioning them further. Some of these conceptions that dominate the market, but also broader discourse in the country, I believe are rooted in the nationalist sentiments (the country's primary enemy is always situated outside of the borders and the fact that some of the objects bought by Georgians remain in the country is considered 'ours'). I think others are related to the traumatic experience of extensive privatizations in the early 2000s that has been deeply engrained in the consciousness of people. What is largely missing, though, and is slowly but visibly emerging in Georgia, is the class discourse and consciousness. A handful of emerging voices are heard, as has become visible during the protests against the building of Namakhvani Dam, and I would only hope that these voices become stronger.

I would like to end the thesis with Terence Turner, who argues that politics is ultimately "not just to accumulate value, but to define what value is, and how different values …. dominate, encompass, or otherwise relate to one another" (Graeber 2013, 228).

Bibliography

Alexander, Catherine. 2004. 'Values, Relations, and Changing Bodies: Privatization and Property Rights in Kazakhstan'. In *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*, edited by Caroline Humphrey and Katherine Verdery. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003086451.

Aliyev, Khatai, and Nargiz Ahmadova. 2020. 'Testing Tourism-Led Economic Growth and Economic-Driven Tourism Growth Hypotheses: The Case of Georgia'. *Tourism* 68 (1): 43–57. https://doi.org/10.37741/t.68.1.4.

Bardhi, Fleura. 2003. 'Thrill of the Hunt: Thrift Shopping For Pleasure'. *ACR North American Advances* NA-30. https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/8818/volumes/v30/NA-30/full.

Bierschenk, Thomas. 2021. 'Afterword: Brokerage as Social Practice'. *Cultural Dynamics* 33 (4): 418–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/09213740211034060.

Boltanski, Luc, and Arnaud Esquerre. 2016. 'The Economic Life of Things'. *New Left Review*, no. 98 (April): 31–54.

———. 2020. *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities | Wiley*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Polity. https://www.wiley.com/en-it/Enrichment%3A+A+Critique+of+Commodities-p-9781509528745.

Bouzarovski, Stefan, Joseph Salukvadze, and Michael Gentile. 2011. 'A Socially Resilient Urban Transition? The Contested Landscapes of Apartment Building Extensions in Two Post-Communist Cities'. *Urban Studies* 48 (13): 2689–2714. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010385158.

Burawoy, Michael, and Katherine Verdery. 1999. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Colliers International Georgia. 2017. 'Agmashenebeli Garden Development Concept (I-VI), აღმაშენებლის ბაღების განვითარების კონცეფცია (I-IV)'.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). 2021. 'Georgia: Economy-Wide Effects of Adaptation in Tourism and Road Infrastructure. Sectoral Policy Brief Report under the Project Global Programme on Climate Resilient Economic Development (CRED)'. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Eiss, Paul K. 2008. 'Beyond the Object: Of Rabbits, Rutabagas and History'. *Anthropological Theory* 8 (1): 79–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607087496.

Etzold, Benjamin. 2016. 'Migration, Informal Labour and (Trans) Local Productions of Urban Space - The Case of Dhaka's Street Food Vendors: Migration, Informal Labour and (Trans)Local Productions of Urban Space'. *Population, Space and Place* 22 (2): 170–84. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1893.

Frederiksen, Martin Demant. 2012. '"A Gate, but Leading Where?" In Search of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism in Post-Soviet Tbilisi'. In *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence*, edited by Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja. Berghahn Books.

Glick Schiller, Nina, and Ayse Çağlar. 2009. 'Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (2): 177–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830802586179.

Gogishvili, David, and Suzanne Harris-Brandts. 2020. 'Coinciding Practices of Exception in Urban Development: Mega-Events and Special Economic Zones in Tbilisi, Georgia'. *European Planning Studies* 28 (10): 1999–2019. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1701995.

González, Sara. 2006. 'Scalar Narratives in Bilbao: A Cultural Politics of Scales Approach to the Study of Urban Policy'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30 (4): 836–57. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2006.00693.x.

Graeber, David. 2001. *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave.
———. 2013. 'It Is Value That Brings Universes into Being'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2): 219–43. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.2.012.
Grubbauer, Monika, and Joanna Kusiak. 2012. *Chasing Warsaw: Socio-Material Dynamics of Urban Change since 1990*. Interdisciplinary Urban Research, volume 15. Frankfurt New York: Campus-Verl.
Gugushvili, Dimitri. 2017. 'Lessons from Georgia's Neoliberal Experiment: A Rising Tide Does Not Necessarily Lift All Boats'. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50 (1): 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2016.11.001.
Hall, Tim, and Phil Hubbard. 1998. *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation*. Wiley.
Humphrey, Caroline. 1999. 'Traders, "Disorder", and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia'. In *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*, edited by Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery. Rowman & Littlefield.
———. 2002. 'The Mythmaking, Narratives, and the Dispossessed in Russia'. In *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501725722.
Janssens, Freek, and Ceren Sezer. 2013. 'Marketplaces as an Urban Development Strategy'. *Built Environment* 39 (2): 169–71. https://doi.org/10.2148/benv.39.2.169.
Jessop, Bob, and Ngai-Ling Sum. 2000. 'An Entrepreneurial City in Action: Hong Kong's Emerging Strategies in and for (Inter)Urban Competition'. *Urban Studies* 37 (12): 2287–2313. https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980020002814.
Jones, Stephen F. 2012. 'Reflections on the Rose Revolution'. *European Security* 21 (1): 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2012.656596.
Karchiladze, Natia. 2018. 'Gender Aspects of Informal Economics: On the example of the street vendors residing in Tbilisi, არაფორმალური ეკონომიკის გენდერული ასპექტები: თბილისში მცხოვრები გარემოვაჭრე ქალების მაგალითზე'. Tbilisi, Georgia: Ivane Javakhishvili State University.
Keane, Webb. 2008. 'Market, Materiality and Moral Metalanguage'. *Anthropological Theory* 8 (1): 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607087493.
Khokhobaia, Merab. 2015. 'Tourism Policy Challenges in Post-Soviet Georgia' 9 (3).
Khutsishvili, Ketevan. 2012. 'Bazaar Culture in Georgia: The Case of Tbilisi'. *Berliner Blätter*, Sonderheit 59, , 41–54.
Kovtiak, Elisabeth. 2018. 'A Bridge to the Past: Public Memory and Nostalgia for the Communist Times in Modern Georgia'. *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12 (1): 31–51. https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0005.
Lindquist, Johan. 2015. 'Brokers and Brokerage, Anthropology Of'. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 870–74. Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12178-6.
Manavlishvili, Lela. 2004. 'It was said it is allowed?! If street trade is allowed again, why is the taking of booths still going on? აკი, ნებადართულიაო?!, თუ გარევაჭრობა კვლავ დაუშვეს, ჯიხურების აღება მაინც რად გრძელდება?' *Georgian Republic*, 23 March 2004, 67 edition.
Manning, Paul. 2009. 'The City of Balconies: Elite Politics and the Changing 71 Semiotics of the Post-Socialist Cityscape'. In *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet*, edited by Kristof Van Assche, Joseph Salukvadze, and Nick Shavishvili. Edwin Mellen Press.
Mchedzlidze, Kakha. 2004. 'With the sale of what begins the all encompassing privatization?', 2004.

Morales, Alfonso. 2009. 'Public Markets as Community Development Tools'. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 28 (4): 426–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X08329471.
Munn, Nancy D. 1992. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim Society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Otto, Ton, and Rane Willerslev. 2013. 'Introduction. Value as Theory: Comparison, Cultural Critique, and Guerilla Ethnographic Theory'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.1.002.
Owen, Elizabeth. 2005. 'Privatizing Georgia: Dollars Are the Guide |'. *Eurasianet*, 2005. https://eurasianet.org/privatizing-georgia-dollars-are-the-guide.
Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press Books.
Rekhviashvili, Lela. 2015a. 'Counterbalancing Marketization Informally: Institutional Reforms and Informal Economic Practices in Georgia (2003 - 2012)'. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University.
———. 2015b. 'Marketization and the Public-Private Divide: Contestations between the State and the Petty Traders over the Access to Public Space in Tbilisi'. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 35 (July): 478–96. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-10-2014-0091.
Salukvadze, Joseph. 2009. 'Market Versus Planning? Mechanisms of Spatial Change in Post-Soviet Tbilisi'. In *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet*, edited by Kristof Van Assche and Nick Shavishvili. Tbilisi, Georgia: Edwin Mellen Press.
Salukvadze, Joseph, and Oleg Golubchikov. 2016. 'City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia — A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region'. *Cities* 52 (March): 39–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.11.013.
Schlögel, Karl. 2012. 'Theses on Post-Socialist Urban Transformation'. In *Chasing Warsaw: Socio-Material Dynamics of Urban Change since 1990*, edited by Joanna Kusiak and Monika Grubbauer. Interdisciplinary Urban Research, Volume 15. Frankfurt New York: Campus-Verl.
Sherry, John Jr. 1990. 'A Sociocultural Analysis of a Midwestern American Flea Market'. *Journal of Consumer Research* 17.
Stovel, Katherine, and Lynette Shaw. 2012. 'Brokerage'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (1): 139–58. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150054.
Tbilisi Development Fund. 2018. 'Rehabilitation-Adaptation of Dry Bridge (March 9 and Dedaena Gardens) - მშრალი ხიდის (9 მარტისა და დედაენის ბაღების) რეაბილიტაცია-ადაპტაცია'.
Tevzadze, Marita. 2015. 'Six Bridges You Need to Cross If You Are in Georgia'. *Georgian Airways*, no. 4.
Thompson, Michael. 2017. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value - New Edition*. Pluto Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1rfsn94.
Todua, Nugzar. 2017. 'Social Media Marketing for Promoting Tourism Industry in Georgia'.
Tukhiashvili, Ema. 2009a. 'The Dry Bridge on the River of Hunger მშრალი ხიდი შიმშილის მდინარეზე'. *Sunday Palitra*, 2009, 27 edition.
———. 2009b. 'Street vending here and there (გარევაჭრობა ალაგ-ალაგ)'. *Sunday Palitra* 24 (August).
Turner, Terence. 2008. 'Marxian Value Theory: An Anthropological Perspective'. *Anthropological Theory* 8 (1): 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607087494.
———. 2017. *The Fire of the Jaguar*. Edited by Jane Fajans. Chicago: Hau Books.
Van Assche, Kristof, Joseph Salukvadze, and Nick Shavishvili, eds. 2009. *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet*. Tbilisi, Georgia: Edwin Mellen Press.

Verdery, Katherine, and Caroline Humphrey, eds. 2004. *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*. English ed. Wenner-Gren International Symposium Series. Berg.
Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. 'The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (4): 387–415.
Watson, Sophie. 2009. 'The Magic of the Marketplace: Sociality in a Neglected Public Space'. *Urban Studies* 46 (8): 1577–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009105506.