

MIMOSAS, BEACHES, MANDARINS, OR ONE YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE RUSSIAN-ABKHAZIAN BORDER. *Summary*

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This text is part of a series of essays by Russian sociologists who took part in a two-week “fieldwork school” on both sides of the border between Russia and the breakaway republic of Abkhazia in the fall of 2005. They spent the first week in a village on the Russian side of the border, and the second in the Abkhazian resort town of Gagra. The school focused on transborder networks and the border as a social space, as well as social conditions specific to Abkhazia, such as civil society in a weak state and the tourism industry in an unrecognized republic. The authors reflect on their own experiences as outside observers in this region.

This essay attempts to reconstruct the annual cycle of transborder activity, focusing on three seasons of increased contacts. The first wave coincides with the summer tourist season, when both visitors and locals use cross-border contacts to find or sell services such as accommodation, and there is competition between resort towns on either side of the border. The second wave begins in the late fall, when the usually haphazard transborder trade intensifies and reaches industrial levels due to the export of Abkhazian citrus fruits to Russia. The routinization of such economic contacts contributes to making border crossings less chaotic and unpredictable, e.g. by separating automobile and pedestrian checkpoints. Finally, a third wave begins in early spring, when Abkhazian mimosas are sold to Russia in time for International Women’s Day (associated with flower-giving), with local producers often taking shipments to distant Russian cities in person. The seasonal nature of transborder activity structures the lives of residents both sides of the border, demonstrating that it is more real than sometimes assumed.