

the film, the journey

My paternal grandparents were born in Bessarabia and moved to Brazil in 1931, which became the country where all my subsequent family was born and raised. I never met my grandparents and no one else in the family had stories to tell about them. Therefore, I have always been caught in the mystique, the historical puzzle of their existence. Slowly I started a genealogical research, and only in 2008, my father, sister and I were able to go to their birthplace, a little country now called Moldova.

Going back meant establishing a connection but also was a way to find out what happened to our relatives who never came to Brazil because they had been killed by the Nazi and its sympathizers. The trip turned out to be a deep journey into history and memory. We learned much more than we could have expected and were conflicted with extermination sites of our own family and what is still left of Judaism in that region.

Our trip and research resulted on the documentary *Mamaliga Blues*. Having the camera as my eye, everything is seen through its lens. We walk through the capital Chisinau, Edinitz, Orhei and many other cities and villages, experiencing what Moldova is, its variety of ethnicities, and the few Jews who still live there. This Jewish population is not renewing itself, it is not getting any younger, and its memories are dying. It belongs to a past that is slowly vanishing. Monuments, buildings, and landmarks of the once vibrant Jewish community are in decay.

One of our main goals in this visit was to find the grave of my great-grandparents, which is now the sole testimony of our former existence on Moldovan soil. Having as a starting point only one fading photograph of the grave, we drove through ancient villages, walked in the bushes of abandoned cemeteries, and met locals. Although we encountered many

clues and surprises, we never found the grave. It was only two months after our trip, that our guide said she had found it. The grave is located in one of the most impressive and untouched cemeteries remaining in Eastern Europe - Vadul Raskov.

Simon Geissbuhler wrote in his book **Like Shells on a Shore:**

The Jewish Cemetery is neither on the list of the International Jewish Cemetery Project nor in the inventory of Lo Tishkach. At least now the Jewish cemetery in Vadul Raskov is documented in this book.

And it may remain the only place documented, if not for *Mamaliga Blues*.

Our discoveries also touch the subject of immigration. It strongly connects with my grandparents: we are all immigrants. They moved away from their homeland as I did when I moved from Brazil to the US in 2002. People immigrate for different reasons, they might be forced to sometimes, but ultimately immigration means to look for a better life somewhere else. It is a subject as relevant as it was 70 years ago.

The documentary was shot in a “cinéma vérité” style, using hand-held camera and being truthful to each moment, capturing our experiences as they happen. The camera is the audience’s eye, as they follow us on our journey. Old and new pictures will be used, as well as maps and graphics to orient the audience. The music has Eastern European and Brazilian influences. There are 5 languages spoken (English, Portuguese, Russian, Romanian and Yiddish) with English subtitles. These together create a peculiar collage of sound and culture.

This personal narrative brings us to a larger scale, reflecting on communities and society, because it is through history and a collection of individual stories that each society is able to mirror itself and move

forward. It is an inherent human characteristic to try to comprehend where we come from and to reflect on the past in an attempt to understand the present and, perhaps, the future.

Mamaliga is a staple food in Moldova, and one of the few common elements found throughout the country. Going back to our roots meant something like Mamaliga: something basic, warm and strangely familiar.