

New Russian Imperialism and Georgia: Violent Spatial Practices, Disrupted Places, and Destabilized Spaces

Giorgi Tavadze (PhD)

Grigol Robakidze University, Georgia

Abstract: Places are necessary prerequisites for human life. Humans always identify themselves with certain places which, in turn have strong influence on humans' individual and collective identities even when this influence is not explicitly acknowledged. The author of the article argues that Russia's new imperialism rests on systematic violent spatial practices, which disrupt places and destabilize spaces in the neighbouring countries. These violent spatial practices constitute what can be called a "colonization of everyday space" which disrupts the place-ballet and fundamental feeling of security which humans associate with their everyday places, thereby producing anxiety, fear, and suffering.

Key Words: Russian imperialism, Georgia, violent spatial practices, disrupted places, destabilized spaces.

It is not enough for a hegemonic power to declare an official policy. It must establish it as a new norm of international law by exemplary action.

Noam Chomsky, *Preventive War, 'The Supreme Crime'*

The annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in March, 2014 (an "exemplary action" to summon up Chomsky's accurate remark) marked a new, aggressive wave in Russian imperialism since the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. In the present article, I argue that Russia's new imperialism under the cover of protecting Russia's citizens and civilian population in general, actually (and contrary to the assertions of high-ranking Russian officials and some western pundits) rests on systematic violent spatial practices, which disrupt places and destabilize spaces in the neighbouring countries, thereby threatening the very object it pretends to defend. In addition to this, I (along with other authors) consider that Russia's new imperialism goes hand in hand with the absence of (organized) civil society in Russia. This can be explained by Russia's internal political turmoils in the early 1990s and by rising authoritarianism, chauvinism, racism and neo-fascism in Russia since the end of the 20th century. Combined, these processes have been destroying at the roots almost every incentive aimed at developing stronger civil society in Russia.

I begin my discussion of the topic from the last point. In an interview in 1989 Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990) said that Russia "jumped out of history and committed the metaphysical suicide of trying to bypass reality for the ideal."¹ What exactly did he want to say with this bizarre comment? Close reading of a text reveals

¹ "The Civil Society: An Interview With Merab Mamardashvili", <http://car.owu.edu/pdfs/1989-2-3.pdf> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

that he pointed to the absence of civil society in Russia. According to Mamardashvili, the main cause of this absence is the rule of Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584) who is responsible for “destroying” the Russian society. “Nothing was important if it didn't coincide with the will of the tsar. All of society became an elongated shadow of the tsar. But shadows aren't real. From that time forward unreality became the condition of social life in Russia.”² This conclusion underlies Mamardashvili's belief that “a long history of Russia had prepared the advent of Marxist-Leninism and Stalinism and the kind of state the Soviet Union has become in the 20th century.”³

Of course, Mamardashvili's arguments are metaphysical and difficult (if not impossible) to prove empirically. But one point is clear: he considers that there has been a strong link between the empire-building and suppressing the *Others* in Russia. This is the thread which I intend to follow below.

In his recent work “Putin's Wars. The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism”⁴ Van Herpen formulates four roots of Russian imperialism: 1. Russia's geographical position; 2. Russia's economic system; 3. Russia's expansionist tradition; 4. A deliberate expansionist policy conducted by the Russian ruling elite.⁵ He also pays particular attention to the close connection between “internal despotism” and “external imperialism” in Russia and considers them as “mutually reinforcing processes.”⁶

Both Mamardashvili and Van Herpen emphasize that absence of civil society is inextricably intertwined with internal despotism. From this point of view the perspective of building strong civil society in Russia has rather gloomy future. Recent developments in this country indicate that state tightens its control over non-governmental organizations under the pretext of “protecting” Russia from outside attempts to interfere in its internal politics.⁷

Of course, it would be naivety to expect that a country with dubious civil rights record will fully respect international law and basic human rights while treating small neighbours. For Russia's autocratic elite democratic aspirations of its several neighbour countries are a pain in the neck. Therefore, Russia's imperial spatial practices rely on systematic violence and destabilization of spaces of adjacent countries making Russia in this sense an *imperial parasite* which feeds itself from the spaces of putrefaction and zones of destabilization. These violent spatial practices which are completely neglectful to cultural differences, erode spaces of everyday movement and action⁸ and destroy the links which connects places together.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. For Mamardashvili's thought see also, L. Zakaradze, “Merab Mamardashvili: Perception of European Identity. A Road Towards Self-Awareness”, *European Scientific Journal*, July 2013, Special Edition, pp. 87–96.

⁴ M. H. Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars. The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ Ibid. p. 17 ff. See also M. Galeotti and A. S. Bowen, “Putin's Empire of the Mind. How Russia's President Morphed from Realist to Ideologue – and What He will do Next”, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2014, pp. 16–19. On Russian imperialism see also A. Cohen, *Russian Imperialism. Development and Crisis*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996.

⁷ See “Russia: Controversial NGO bill becomes law”, 21.07.2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18938165>; “Russia NGO law: Election watchdog Golos fined”, 25.04.2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22291563>; “Russia NGO law: Election watchdog Golos suspended”, 26.06.2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23070102>; T. Balmforth, “Levada Center, Russia's Most Respected Pollster, Fears Closure”, 21.05.2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-levada-center-foreign-agent/24992729.html> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

⁸ In the space of everyday movement and action (in short: *everyday space*) humans perform their mundane activities and interact with each other and places. In the context of everyday space the notion of *place-ballet* is especially important. According to D. Seamon, place-ballet is “a fusion of many time-space routines and body-ballets in terms of place” (See D. Seamon, ‘Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets’, in: A. Buttimer and D. Seamon (eds.), *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980, p. 159). “Time-space routine is a set of habitual bodily behaviors which extends through a considerable portion of time” (ibid. p. 158). Body-ballet is “a set of integrated behaviors which sustain a particular task or

Before examining more closely nature and essence of places I wish to clarify what I mean in term “imperial”. Employing the term “imperial” to denote Russia’s actions against its neighbours I want to emphasize the ambitions of current leadership of Russia to restore the previous glory of Soviet Empire, albeit in a completely different context in which it is not accepted (especially on a high-ranking international level) to acknowledge empire-building explicitly. In the wake of this, discourses are flourishing which attempt to disguise real processes by introducing such concepts as “spheres of influence”, “strategic interests” (signaling potential threats), “civilian population” (perfect pretext for occupation), “historical truth” (when justifying annexation of a territory of sovereign country) and so on. These discourses and power centres within them operate at all levels of culture (from international talks and mass media to literature,⁹ painting, and mundane cultural practices) with ultimate aim to justify destabilization, erosion and occupation of the spaces of neighbouring countries.¹⁰

aim, for instance, washing dishes, plowing, housebuilding, potting, or hunting” (ibid. p. 157). To sum up, it can be said that place-ballet constitutes the *rhythm* or *pulse* of place.

⁹ For imperial motives in Russian literature see S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; K. Hokanson, “Literary Imperialism, *Narodnost*’ and Pushkin’s Invention of the Caucasus”, *The Russian Review*, 53 (1994), pp. 336–352; H. Ram, *Imperial Sublime. A Russian Poetics of Empire*, Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

¹⁰ For discourses and their meaning see M. Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”, in: Young, R. (ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston: Routledge, 1981, pp. 51–77; id., *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock Publications, 1972. Analysis of these power discourses transcends the aim of the given paper. Nevertheless, I want to consider several examples. In the first case the discourse of empire (quite unfortunately) is hidden in the cloak of objective science. A. Saporov in his article “From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1918 –1922” desperately tries to convince the readers that so called South Ossetia Autonomous Region was created by bolsheviks solely with the purpose of “conflict resolution” between Georgians and Ossetians. The obvious bias of the article tends to be obscured by the fact that article is published in peer-reviewed academic journal. When discussing the history of conflict in the region Saporov relies *only* on Russian language sources, most of them published in Soviet times and hardly representing the actual flow of events. By reducing the positions of Georgian scholars to only footnote, thereby rejecting the possibility of taking a more balanced view, he himself renders his account as obsolete and victim to Russian imperial discourse. See A. Saporov, “From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1918 –1922”, *Europe–Asia Studies*, vol. 62 (2010), pp. 99–123. For a more balanced view regarding the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, where the mistakes of Georgian government are also taken into consideration see G. Nodia, “The August 2008 War: Main Consequences for Georgia and its Conflicts”, *Nationalities Papers*, 40 (2012), pp. 721–738. In the second case, two western pundits aiming to illuminate US policymakers and general reader about nuances of internal affairs in the breakaway regions of Georgia, point to the necessity of “building ties to contested regions”. Noticing that “due to an ineffective foreign policy, the United States and its Western allies had no relationship with the faction that precipitated the uprising against Ankvab” (former president of de-facto Republic of Abkhazia), they wisely deduce that “now Abkhazia has seemingly moved even closer to Russia than before”. A perfect example of the working of imperial discourse which has permeated even the online-space of *Foreign Policy*! As if Abkhazia has not *already* been the puppet state of Russia! Such sophisticated and elaborated manner of judgement conceals the very nature of imperial discourse and its violent spatial practices which on the ground is rude, pulverizing and inhumane. For the above-mentioned article see L. Mitchell and A. Cooley, “Learning from Crimea”, 16.06.2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/06/16/learning_from_crimea (Accessed 07.07.2014). Recently Russia’s one of the most prominent ultra-nationalist thinker Alexander Dugin has told BBC News that war between Russia and Ukraine “is inevitable” (See D. Newman, “Russian nationalist thinker Dugin sees war with Ukraine”, 10.07.2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28229785>, Accessed 10.07.2014). Dugin has played crucial role in the developing of imperialistic discourse in Russia. For imperial discourses and Orthodoxy-related geopolitics in Russia see D. Sidorov, “Post-Imperial Third Romes: Resurrections of a Russian Orthodox Geopolitical Metaphor”, *Geopolitics*, 11 (2006), pp. 317–347. Finally, even such an ardent critic of imperialism as Noam Chomsky, overdiligent to demonstrate that the world is threatened *only* by American imperialism, when discussing Russo-Georgian War (2008) declares that: “The basic facts are not seriously in dispute [sic]. South Ossetia, along with the much more significant region of Abkhazia, were

According to American philosopher E. S. Casey, “to be in the world, to be situated at all, is to be in place.”¹¹ Places are necessary prerequisites for human life. Canadian geographer E. Relph in his brilliant work “Place and Placelessness” remarks that “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place.”¹² Humans always identify themselves with certain places which, in turn have strong influence on humans’ individual and collective identities even when this influence is not explicitly acknowledged. In short, humans and places interact. Humans create and change places and give them new meanings. On the other side, places exert an influence on identity, thought, and action.¹³ And “if places are indeed a fundamental aspect of man’s existence in the world, if they are sources of security and identity for individuals and for groups of people, then it is important that the means of experiencing, creating, and maintaining significant places are not lost.”¹⁴

Violent spatial practices perpetuated by Russia disrupt places and destabilize spaces, they decouple connections between humans and places and produce fractured spaces. First of all, these violent practices disrupt the *space of everyday movement and action* by effective occupation, installing barbed wire fences, building concrete walls and checkpoints. These measures preclude humans’ interactions with places and give rise to anxiety, homelessness and *topophobia* (an aversion for places).¹⁵ In the lines to follow, I will focus on specific instances which demonstrate Russia’s violent spatial practices towards Georgia.

“Occupation is a matter of fact – not of intention or declaration” astutely remarked Derek Gregory.¹⁶ But I want to emphasize the episode from occupation of Georgian territories by Russia which has been largely forgotten by general public and partly concealed by the then government of Georgia. During the Second Chechen War, on February 14, 2000 Russia seized the small village Pichvni, near Shatili where Georgians had main border post. Georgian border troops and local Georgian residents withdrew from the village in order – as Tbilisi officials finally explained on May 16, 2000 – to “avoid a conflict.”¹⁷

Shatili residents had winter barns in Pichvni which is about six kilometres away. In the wake of Russian occupation Georgian farmers had to abandon their winter hay supplies

assigned by Stalin to his native Georgia [sic]. Western leaders sternly admonish that Stalin’s directives must be respected, despite the strong opposition of Ossetians and Abkhazians.” By reducing the world politics to American imperialism (and turning blind eye to other imperial practices) and relying on false facts, Chomsky willy-nilly caters to the Russian imperial ambitions. See N. Chomsky, “Ossetia-Russia-Georgia”, <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/200809--2.htm> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

¹¹ See E. S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. xv.

¹² See E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion, 1976, p. 1.

¹³ See G. Tavadze, *Shatili from the Perspective of Philosophical Geography*, Tbilisi: Nakeri, 2013, p. 103.

¹⁴ See E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, p. 6. For the explication of the nature of places, besides Casey’s above-mentioned work, see also J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; D. Seamon, “Place, Place Identity, and Phenomenology: A Triadic Interpretation Based on J. G. Benett’s Systematics”, in: H. Casakin and F. Bernardo, *The Role of Place Identity in the Perception, Understanding, and Design of Built Environments*, Bentham eBooks, 2012, pp. 3–21. For an excellent introduction about places see T. Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. For contemporary approaches towards place see L. C. Manzo and P. Devine-Wright, eds., *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications*, New York: Routledge, 2014.

¹⁵ See E. Relph, “Geographical experiences and being-in-the-world: The phenomenological origins of geography”, in: D. Seamon and R. Mugerauer, eds., *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985, p. 27. For classic analysis of violent spatial practices see D. Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

¹⁶ see D. Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, p. 219.

¹⁷ See <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/chechnya-sl/conversations/topics/8570> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

and drive their cattle back to Shatili, where the animals nearly died of starvation while the farmers tried desperately to borrow hay from neighbours.¹⁸

In Upper Khevsureti where Pichvni is located pastures are very scarce. Therefore, occupation of the village fractured the space of everyday movement and action of Shatili's residents. They were deprived not only of their possessions, but also of historical place where their ancestors dwelled and worked. Albeit small in scope, such "mini" occupations have no less destructive effect than occupation of a whole region.¹⁹

Violent spatial practices are continuing up to date. Russia arbitrarily moves the borders of the so called South Ossetia inside the Georgian-controlled territories. In December, 2013 Russian soldiers installed barbed wire fences along villages Plavi and Plavismani, effectively fracturing the everyday space of villages. Now residents are unable to visit cemeteries and cultivate the land which is beyond the "border".²⁰ The cynical nature of "borderisation" is more exacerbated by the fact that for sustaining themselves residents of villages mainly depend on agriculture. Preventing them to cultivate their own land actually means reducing them to poverty.

This "creeping occupation" by Russia involves building of a fence (which is now approximately 45 kilometres long) along administrative boundary line which separates so called South Ossetia from Georgia. In 2013 the process of "borderisation" intensified as Russians dugged new trenches and installed surveillance devices in the villages Dvani, Ghogheti, Atoci, and Akhali Khurvaleti.²¹

Violent spatial practices are not limited only to building of walls and fences. Encroachments on everyday space are also manifested by illegal detainings of Georgian citizens by Russian soldiers and so called South Ossetian paramilitary forces. Almost all of detained residents of conflict region were performing some kind of activity in everyday space (picking mushrooms or capers in the forest, working in the field, herding cows, collecting staphylea and so on).²² In the worst cases, they were kidnapped directly from the

¹⁸ See G. York, "Tension mounts in Georgia as Chechen war spills over", 29.5.2000, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/tension-mounts-in-georgia-as-chechen-war-spills-over/article4164365/> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

¹⁹ For sacred, historical and everyday places and spaces in Shatili and their interconnection see G. Tavadze, *Shatili from the Perspective of Philosophical Geography*. For exact location of Pichvni, visit <http://wikimapia.org/#lang=en&lat=42.672339&lon=45.191274&z=15&m=b&show=/31040154/Pichvni&search=pichvni> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²⁰ "Russia installs barbed wire fences along village Plavi and Plavismani". 10.12.2013, <http://www.georgianews.ge/politics/25613-russia-installs-barbed-wire-fences-along-village-plavi-and-plavismani.html> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²¹ See Z. Jgharkava, "Russia pushes Georgia towards confrontation", 27.09.2013, http://www.georgiatoday.ge/article_details.php?id=11497; M. Ellena, "On Edge – Life Along the Dividing Line", 17.11.2013, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26697>; "Russian soldiers resume erection of wire fences in Ghogheti village", 30.11.2013, <http://www.georgianews.ge/politics/25514-russian-soldiers-resume-erection-of-wire-fences-in-ghogheti-village.html>; "Russian soldiers continue to install barbed wire fences along Atoci village", 25.02.2014, <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/conflicts/54998-russian-soldiers-continue-to-install-barbed-wire-fences-along-atoci-village.html?ar=A>. For photographic coverage of "Borderisation" in Dvani see <http://www.civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=87&gallery=97> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²² See "Russian Soldiers Kidnapped 6 Georgians from Sachkhere, Georgia", 01.06.2011, <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/conflicts/28963-russian-soldiers-kidnapped-6-georgians-from-sachkhere-georgia.html?ar=A>; "Citizen of Georgia Kidnapped from Village Bershueti", 10.07.2013, <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/conflicts/48597-citizen-of-georgia-kidnapped-from-village-bershueti.html?ar=A>; "Russian Occupants Detain Three Women at Khurvaleti Village", 25.04.2014, <http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/82582-russian-occupants-detain-three-women-at-khurvaleti-village>; "Family members of the abducted from Khurvaleti are demanded to pay money", 25.04.2014, <http://georgianpress.ge/com/news/view/3411?lang=3>; "Russian Soldiers Kidnap People from Borderline Villages and Take Them to Tskhinvali", 29.04.2014,

villages.²³ These and other innumerable undocumented cases constitute what can be called “colonization of everyday space”²⁴ which disrupts the place-ballet and fundamental feeling of security which humans associate with their everyday places, thereby producing anxiety, fear, and suffering.

According to the website of Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, there are 253 574 internally displaced persons in Georgia (08.04.2014).²⁵ After the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, 20 272 individuals remain in displacement.²⁶ With the help of international donors Georgian government has built for them new settlements in Tserovani, Khurvaleti, Verkhvebi, Shavshvebi and other places.²⁷ Nevertheless, displaced persons are still struggling for their subsistence and suffering from high blood pressure, excitement and depression.²⁸ Will these settlements forever substitute their native homes? Will these fragile, new (ersatz) everyday spaces become the basis of future meaningful activities for their residents or will they turn into places of despair, fear and anxiety? I want to answer these questions somewhat indirectly by borrowing several lines from the brilliant work of French philosopher G. Bachelard.²⁹ The underlying concept of the work is that of house to which Bachelard ascribes great

<http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=17708&lang=eng>; “Seven more Georgian citizens illegally detained at border”, 12.05.2014, <http://agenda.ge/news/13966/eng> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²³ “Condition of Four Georgians Kidnapped from Sachkhere Two Weeks Ago Is Unknown”, 14.09.2008, <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/justice/1409-condton-of-fou-geogns-kdnpped-fom-schkhee-two-weeks-ago-is-unknown.html?ar=A>; “Ossetians Kidnapped 16 Georgian Citizens from Dusheti District”, 26.10.2009, <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=11358&lang=eng> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²⁴ This notion is different from Lefebvre’s “colonization of everyday life” to whom it means “the superimposition and hyperextension of abstract space”. See D. Gregory, “Geographical Imaginations”, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 403 ff. See also H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, *Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, translated by John Moore, London/New York: Verso, 2002, *passim*; S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, London/New York: Continuum, 2004, *passim*; S. Kipfer, C. Schmid, K. Goonewardena, R. Milgrom, “Globalizing Lefebvre?”, in: S. Kipfer, C. Schmid, K. Goonewardena, R. Milgrom (eds.), *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, New York/London: Routledge, 2008, p. 294 ff.

²⁵ <http://www.mra.gov.ge/eng/static/55> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²⁶ “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia, Georgia”, *Report of the Secretary-General*, 7.05.2014, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/868 (Accessed 07.07.2014). In this report it is clearly stated that “OHCHR continues to receive allegations concerning, inter alia, impediments to freedom of movement, including of internally displaced persons, to the enjoyment of property rights and to access to religious and cultural sites and education, arbitrary arrests in areas adjacent to the administrative boundary line and poor conditions of detention in the context of alleged illegal crossings” (p. 4); “[...] temporary detentions still occur when farmers intentionally or unintentionally cross into these areas, for example, when visiting graveyards, retrieving stray cattle, attending to irrigation channels or transiting to and from work in their fields” (p. 6).

²⁷ “Verkhvebi IDP Settlement”, w. d., <http://civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=87&size=wide&gallery=78>; “The IDP settlement in Tserovani”, 20.10.2013, <https://www.behance.net/gallery/11597643/The-IDP-settlement-in-Tserovani> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²⁸ M. Corso, “Georgia: IDPs Have Found Homes, but Not Work”, 17.08.2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav081809.shtml>; “Houses of Internally Displaced People (IDP) are Flooded in Georgia”, 16.03.2010, <http://www.demotix.com/news/278436/houses-internally-displaced-people-idp-are-flooded-georgia#media-278431>; M. Corso, “Georgia: War IDPs Fight Ongoing Battle with Poverty”, 08.08.2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65764>; S. Modebadze, “Five years since the war-challenges remain”, 08.08.2013, http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/2921_august_8_2013/2921_salome.html; S. Tsitsikashvili, “High Blood Pressure, Excitement and Depression among IDPs”, 22.04.2010, <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=8200&lang=eng>. Nevertheless, there still remains a place for human compassion and mutual aid. See for example G. Aptsiauri, “A Georgian-Ossetian family sees in the New Year”, 9.02.2012, <http://www.conflict-voices.net/blog/2012/02/a-georgian-ossetian-family-sees-in-the-new-year/> (Accessed 07.07.2014).

²⁹ G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

significance. According to him, “our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”³⁰ The thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind are integrated in the house. “Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is ‘cast into the world,’ as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.”³¹ With its cellar and garret, nooks and corridors the house houses places to which humans return in their daydreams. Applying Bachelard’s notion of house to the local level of philosophical geography,³² it can be said that house is a cornerstone of individual’s everyday space. Destabilizing and disrupting everyday spaces of humans by violent spatial practices (demolishing houses, fence building, kidnapping local residents) threatens the very existence of houses, injures the identities of their inhabitants (because identities are always embodied³³), destroys the meaningful centres of their existence, and distorts the place-ballet. In the wake of these destructive practices the need for greater responsibility from politicians and military commanders (of whatever side they are), compassion and the ability to forgive, humility, mutual aid and understanding, constant care for places and *building* are of utmost importance. For “only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.”³⁴

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³⁰ See G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 4.

³¹ Ibid. p. 7.

³² For the conceptual framework of philosophical geography see G. Tavadze, *Shatili from the Perspective of Philosophical Geography*, pp. 85–94.

³³ See R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd edition, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, *passim*.

³⁴ See M. Heidegger, “Building – Dwelling – Thinking”. in: M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translations and introduction by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, p. 160.

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