

New Europe College Yearbook
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This collection contains the papers of the Fellows from the *Pontica Magna* and the *Gerda Henkel* Fellowship Programs. Both are aimed at researchers from Eastern Europe: the first focuses primarily on the Black Sea region, the second on the countries of the former Soviet Union.

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B/ORDERIZATION OF THE BOUNDARY: ENTANGLED PERSPECTIVES ON THE SPLIT VILLAGES OF THE TSKHINVALI REGION/ SOUTH OSSETIA

Abstract

Since the Russo – Georgian war in August 2008, a once fictional administrative boundary of the currently occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, is being transformed into a heavily militarized “state border”. While much of the perimeter stays uncertain and unmarked, locals are frequently detained by the Russian/South Ossetian militants, which creates constant psychological pressure and an insecure living environment. In some cases, „border” demarcations serve to create security through their supposed clarity. At the same time, they produce uncertainties for different actors and in different places. This paper shows how locals experience the complex process of b/orderisation of the boundary around the occupied territory; how this creates ambiguities, precludes clarity, and thus generates further un/certainties that must be dealt with – analytically as much as practically.

Keywords: Borderization, Georgia, Tskhinvali Region, South Ossetia, Creeping Occupation.

1. Introduction

In the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia entered a profound multidimensional crisis. The country turned out to be unprepared for the grueling processes of the post-Soviet socio-economic transition and the restoration of independence and struggled to cope with the domestic or foreign challenges brought on by the new reality. In addition to economic collapse, the disintegration of state institutions, and political instability, the country was also unable to maintain its territorial integrity and avoid ethnic conflicts: first, it found itself embroiled in hostilities in

the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in 1990-92, and later in Abkhazia, in 1992-93 (Loladze 2021).

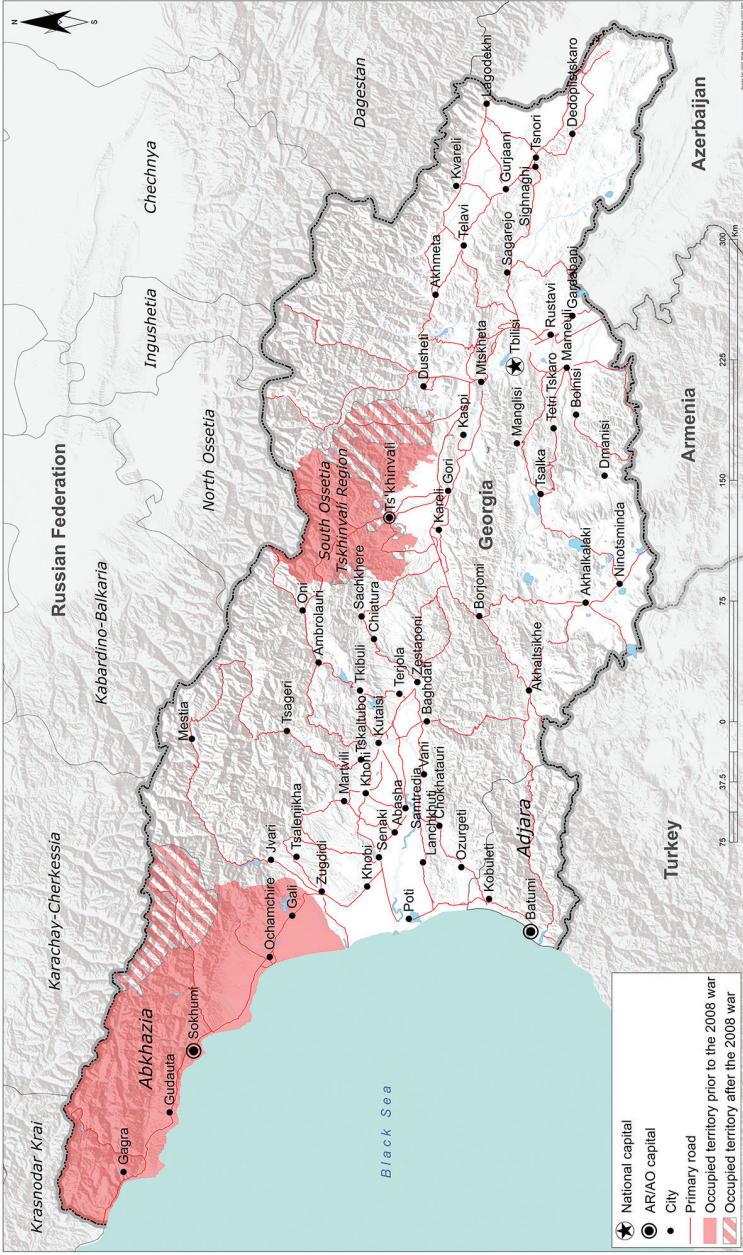
After the hostilities of the 1990s, Georgia and its breakaway regions (especially the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia) went through a period of fragile but still peaceful coexistence, marked by the restoration of economic and social ties and a certain degree of normalization (Zakareishvili 2021; Janiashvili 2020). However, these ties were severed following the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, with Georgia losing control over 151 settlements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region (see Map 1). The b/orderization process, which has been pursued in the vicinity of this region since 2011, resulted in the division of 34 more settlements, with residents' homes and agricultural lands falling on the opposite sides of the dividing line (IDFI 2015).

Prior to the August 2008 war, the Georgian government controlled 110 settlements located in the Great and Little Liakhvi gorges, other gorges adjacent to the Tskhinvali region, as well as in the Akhagori district (see Map 2). Nevertheless, after the war, these villages came under the control of Russia/de facto South Ossetia. Subsequently, in April 2010, the de facto government of the occupied region passed the Law on the State Border (RES 2010). In 2011, based on this law, the Russian side actively resumed the process of b/orderization, which had begun fragmentarily in 2009, as well as the construction of new border infrastructure alongside the occupied territories (Amnesty Int. 2019).

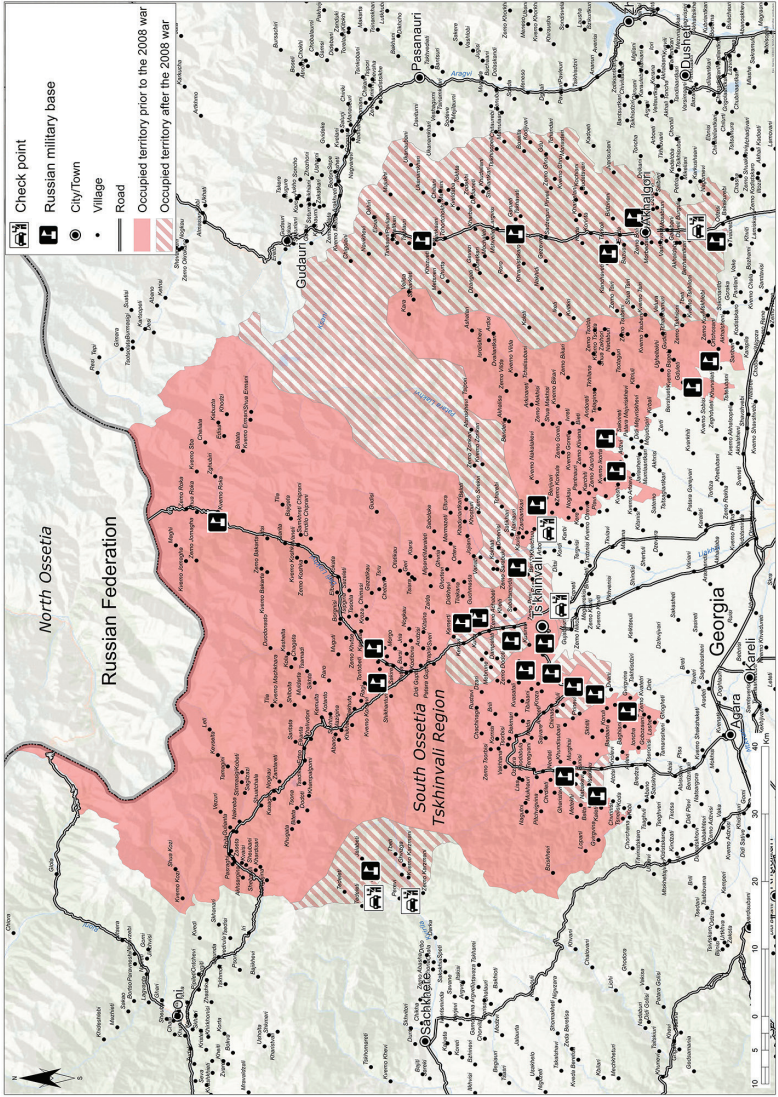
The official positions of Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia, and the international community on the 2008 war and the territories located on the occupation line differ considerably: Georgia and the international community are calling this process a "creeping occupation" or "borderization", while the official Russia and the de facto South Ossetia see it as a transformation of the administrative boundary into a highly militarized international border (Zakareishvili 2021; Jalabadze 2020; Boyle 2016).

Today, the length of the occupation line in the Tskhinvali region equals 350 kilometers. Moreover, according to data from the European Union Monitoring Mission, physical b/orderization includes "more than 60 kilometers of security fences, 20 kilometers of surveillance equipment, over 200 signs with the inscription 'Border of the Republic of South Ossetia', 19 Russian Federation border guard bases and four controlled crossing points" (see Map 2) (EUMM 2018:3).

Most of the perimeter of the dividing line is unclear and not precisely marked. As a result, the occupying military forces often detain the residents.



Map 1. Georgian controlled territories before and after the 2008 war (compiled by the author)



Map 2. Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia before and after the 2008 war (compiled by the author)

This situation puts a constant mental strain on the locals and heightens the feeling of living in an uncertain environment. While in some cases, the “border” signs serve to create a sense of security by purportedly bringing clarity, at the same time they produce uncertainty in various places.

It should be borne in mind that, likely, the Russian occupation regime cannot fully control the movement across the dividing line. Nonetheless, the number of people abducted and detained by the border guards remains alarming. According to official data, from 2008 until the end of 2020 1,365 people were kidnapped from villages near the occupation zone for illegally crossing the “border” (State Security Service 2021; Amnesty International 2019).

Until the fall of 2019, the Russian authorities and the representatives of the de facto South Ossetia allowed the crossing of the demarcation line with specific documents (the so-called “propuski” or passes) at four border checkpoints: in Mosabruni (the so-called Razdakhani), Ergneti, Karzmani, and Sinaguri. However, the occupying forces occasionally closed these checkpoints under various pretexts. The situation became particularly tense after August 2019, in the wake of the events surrounding the Chorchana village after the establishment of a Georgian observation post in Tbilisi-administered territory (EUMM 2019).

These crossing points were completely closed when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020. Before that, only the residents of Akhagori used the Mosabruni crossing points. The crossing points of Perevi-Karzmani and Perevi-Sinaguri were used by the population of several villages located on the Imeretian side. The Ergneti checkpoint was mainly utilized to transport patients to Tbilisi for medical treatment. The residents of other districts in the Tskhinvali region, as well as the residents of Tbilisi-controlled territories, are not allowed to use these checkpoints or to cross the administrative boundary line at all. Likewise, the Russian officers and representatives of the de facto government are preventing ethnic Georgians, who lived in other districts of the Tskhinvali region before the 2008’s armed conflict, from entering the territory (Amnesty 2019).

As stated in the periodical issued by the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia, “the southern part of the administrative boundary of South Ossetia cuts through the most fertile and densely populated agricultural lands in Central Georgia. In this abundance of people, farms, livestock, and plots, the administrative boundary poses an ongoing challenge for conflict-affected populations on both sides. It

impedes freedom of movement; restricts efficient cultivation of agricultural land and separates friends and family.” (Observer 2017: 6).

In addition to producing a challenging day-to-day and political reality, the present situation raises important questions in terms of both anthropological and border studies, depending on the meaning the local population residing near the occupation line ascribes to the dividing line. Based on the interviews conducted in the villages of municipalities as part of the NEC project, this article explores the multidimensional impact of borderization through the interdisciplinary theoretical lens of border studies, analyzing it as a process experienced daily, narrated, and interpreted by the local population.

1.1. “Tskhinvali Region” or “South Ossetia”? A note on the use of terms

The term “South Ossetia” itself is relatively new, and first became official in 1922, when the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created. Until then, no administrative territorial unit with a similar name had ever existed, all the more so outside of Georgian jurisdiction. The first time “Ossetia” (without the word “South”) was used to describe an administrative-territorial unit was in 1843, when the *Ossetian Okrug*, composed of the Java, Smaller Liakhvi and Nari districts, was shortly separated from the Gori Uyezd, but still was under the Tiflis Governorate. The *okrug* in question included about a third of the current Tskhinvali Region, and only existed until 1858, before returning to the Gori Uyezd (minus the Nari district) as the “Mountainous Ossetia” district. (Janiashvili 2017; Jishkariani 2019).

According to existing sources, the first documented unofficial use of the term “South Ossetia” dates from 1830 and had purely orientational purposes – it was used by an anonymous author in the Russian newspaper ‘Tiflisikie Vedomosti’ (№72, 1830).¹ As for the first document in which the highlands of Shida Kartli are mentioned as “Ossetia” (“Осетия” in Russian), Georgian historiography considers it to be an account by general Karl von Knorring (head of the Russian administration and governor in Georgia) dated 26th of March 1802 (Berge 1866:587,717), in which he refers to the high-mountainous parts of the current Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that had a majority of Ossetian population. The rest of the region, populated mainly by Georgians – was denominated “Georgia” (“Грузия” in Russian).

From the very first years after Georgian independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as a response to the separatist movement forming in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, (thus even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union) the newly appointed Georgian government officially adopted a law on the 11th of December 1990 “About the dissolution of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast”, according to the 3rd and 11th sections of the 104th article of the Georgian Constitution (Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia, 1990). This made the situation even more tense, and eventually led to an armed conflict in 1991-1992.

The 1990 resolution was never modified, and to this day, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast remains abolished. But in 2007, on the orders of president Mikheil Saakashvili, the *temporary administration of the administrative-territorial unit on the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast* (Matsne 2007) was created, which didn't refer to a specific, demarcated territory, and the jurisdiction of which spread to the territories controlled by Georgia after the 1991-1992 war (see map 1). But of course, its creation meant and aimed to embrace the whole territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast.

In 2008, after the last military conflict, in which Russia got openly involved against Georgia, the situation in the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast changed radically. After the war, the recognition by the Russian Federation of the self-proclaimed South Ossetian Republic has put Georgia and the rest of the international society in a fundamentally new situation.

As a result of these territorial and administrative changes and the situation following the 2008 war, today, in order to describe the territory in question, the following three terms are mainly used by Georgia and most members of the international community (who do not recognize the independence of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia): “Tskhinvali Region”, “Samachablo” or “Former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast”. Considering that none of these terms fully covers, in geographical terms, the territory currently occupied by Russia (Zakareishvili 2021, Amnesty Int. 2019), in the following article, I use the term “Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia”.

As for the term *B/orderisation*, I borrowed it from Van Houtum's ‘B/ordering Space’ (Houtum 2017). With it, I wanted to conceptually unify the various consequences of the erection of actual, physical borders, emphasize the nature of the newly currently practiced exclusion, as well as the establishment of a literally new order in the divided territories.

1.2. Current state of research

Although the active phase of borderization in the Tskhinvali region began in 2011, the scientific literature based on empirical research is still quite scarce. Here, I should mention the publications of the ongoing research project supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation - "Life of the Villages in Russia's Creeping Occupation Zone" (FR-18-10229) (Jalabadze, Janiashvili, Loladze 2022; Loladze 2021; Jalabadze 2020; Janiashvili 2020;), which examines the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the villages located near the dividing line based on ethnographic research. Comparatively more publications are devoted to the history of the conflict and the geopolitical, macro and meso-level socio-economic and political analysis of the consequences of the 2008 war. This makes it possible to compare the works of both Georgian (Kakachia et al. 2017; Zakareishvili 2021) and foreign researchers (Coppeters 2007; van Peski & Gaecilia 2011; Boyle 2016; Toal & Merebashvili 2019; Sotiriou 2019) and reports from non-governmental and international organizations (Amnesty Int. 2019, EUMM 2018). These publications primarily highlight that the goal of the Russian post-war policy is to gain influence over the present situation in Georgia through illegally occupied territories, artificially established borders, barbed wires, and kidnapping. At the same time, this policy contributes to the transformation of ethnic and civic identities among the population living beyond the occupation line by isolating divided villages and dismantling traditional cultural or socio-economic institutions.

The collection of "Cost of Conflict: Untold Stories - Georgian-Ossetian Conflict in People's Lives" (Alborova, Allen and Kalandarishvili, 2016) is an important publication about the Georgian/ South Ossetian conflict, experienced and witnessed by people on both sides of the border. It is clear from the stories told on both the Georgian and the South Ossetian sides: "While one side perceives events, the other starts demonizing and victimizing itself. The other side wants to reconcile and recognize their past mistakes, but maybe not completely in-depth." (Ibid:6) As the explanation to the different perceptions, the authors name the two sides of the dividing line - the existence of different information fields and political vectors. A series of important papers to rethink the Georgian/ South Ossetian/ Russian conflict are publications based on hundreds of documents and material from archives as part of the New Generation Scholars' Timeline of Georgian-Ossetian Conflict (1977 - 2008): Documents for

Remembering and Rethinking the Past” (Chakvetadze 2019; Jishkariani 2019; Kobakhidze). Such publications play an important role in the Georgian-, Ossetian-, and Russian-speaking societies, in a post-conflict period, and help the process of rethinking historical facts and events interpreted mainly through the lens of nationalist sentiments for decades.

In this regard - aiming to offer an anthropological interpretation of the interviews and analysis of time-spatial characteristics of border and boundary construction dynamics in currently occupied territory - this article is the first attempt to examine the ongoing b/orderization process occurring along the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region using an interdisciplinary theoretical framework of border studies.

1.3. Research context and methodology

This paper presents the results of 45 in-depth interviews (25 women - 21 to 71 (average 48.7) years old; 23 men, 19 to 75 (average 49.3) years old) out of which 32 (17 women, 15 men) interviews were obtained within the framework of the ongoing research project supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation - “Life of the Villages in Russia’s Creeping Occupation Zone” (FR-18-10229) in the summer and autumn of 2019. Another 13 interviews (8 women, 7 men) have been recorded during the fieldtrip organized in the frame of New Europe College’s Pontica Magna fellowship between the 28th of May until the 29th June 2021. These interviews have been recorded in the villages split by the ongoing b/orderization in the southern part of the occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, particularly in the municipalities of Khashuri, K’asp’i, Gori, and Kareli.

The selection of these locations was conditioned by the fact that in these municipalities the occupation line runs across some of the most fertile and densely populated agricultural areas, therefore b/orderization poses a most severe impact on daily safety and social-economic aspects of the local population. It must be mentioned that, unfortunately, I wasn’t able to conduct interviews in the villages controlled by the Russia/South Ossetia de facto government, as since 2008 it has become extremely difficult if not impossible to enter the occupied territory, particularly for the citizens of Georgia.

Using the case study approach made it possible to thoroughly study a particular case of the b/orderization impact on the affected communities and interrelationships. The main data collection techniques I used during

the fieldwork were participant observation, in-depth interviews and “spontaneous focus group” discussions. Spending extensive time in the field made me better acquainted with the life in the selected areas and gave me the possibility to observe and experience locals’ everyday lives, which also helped to gain their trust.

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the fieldwork interviews, I have also analyzed the spatial and historical characteristics of the state borders and administrative boundaries, time-space dynamics in Georgia as well as on the territory of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. To achieve this goal, I have combined bibliographic and archive materials with the spatial data collected from the fieldworks. Using ESRI software products (ArcMap & ArcCatalog 10.2.2) I have compiled geographic data, analyzed information, and built and managed geographic information in a database. This allowed me to spatially analyze and visualize the specific impact of the b/orderization process.

1.4. Theoretical framework

In terms of theory, due to their complex nature, border studies require diverse analytical perspectives. Today, there is no distinct approach that could be considered dominant in this area. In 2011, Anssi Paasi summed up the complexity of the border as an object of research and the need to conceptualize its various dimensions, noting that “since borders are context-bound phenomena, the development of a general border theory is unattainable or even undesirable.” (Paasi 2011: 27).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the conditions of intense globalization that began in the 1990s, in a world of uninterrupted flow of capital and information, some researchers saw the existence of borders as legacy of the past world order incompatible with the new one, focusing on their declining or even disappearing role (Dittgen 2000; Hudson 1998; Kolossov 2005; Kolossov and O’Loughlin 1998; Newman 2006a; Newman and Paasi 1998; Ohmae 1990; Paasi 1998; Shapiro and Alker 1996). However, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the discourse on the decline/disappearance of borders was soon replaced by the securitization discourse, giving borders an altogether new and much more complex meaning (Andreas and Biersteker 2003; Andreas and Snyder 2000; Laitinen 2003).

Political geographers (Nevins, Anderson, Paasi, as well as spatial planners such as Haselsberger) acknowledge that a border is not merely

a dotted line on the map but also an integral component, inseparable from the origin of the state it surrounds. This phenomenon is called the institutionalization of territories, which includes the formation of borders, symbols, and institutions (Anderson 1996; Haselsberger 2014; Nevins 2002; Paasi 2011). Borders are the key political institutions as in complex societies, it is impossible to organize economic, social, or political life without them. Moreover, the continued existence of a physical boundary, or the process of b/orderization itself, creates new subjects and identities associated with them to distinguish groups belonging to or alienated from the subject (Nevins 2002, Choi 2011). This context is directly applicable to de facto entities, such as South Ossetia, which seek to establish governing institutions distinct from Georgia. To achieve this goal the existence of borders carries the necessary strategic, socio-cultural, and symbolic importance for the Russian backed de facto government of the occupied region.

In addition, I applied Haselsberger's concept of "thick" and "thin" borders to the current framework of b/orderization in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia: Haselsberger, who analyzes borders from a spatial planning point of view, assumes that borders are overlapping layers of geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic, and biophysical boundaries. According to this concept, the border is a linear solid dividing element, found both in the actual area and on a map. Boundaries are elements of one particular aspect, which includes four different components (Haselsberger 2014;510):

1. Geopolitical boundaries - territorial and physical, mostly legally certified land. For example, a district, city, region, state, federation, EU, etc...
 2. Socio-cultural boundaries - social and cultural characteristics that are produced in society and sometimes have vague meanings.
 3. Economic boundaries - locally produced, ever-changing frameworks that are defined by economic aspects, such as cost-effectiveness or wealth (economic inclusiveness and exclusivity).
 4. Biophysical boundaries - through characteristics of the natural environment (such as rivers, mountains, landscape zones) in most cases vaguely demarcated terrestrial or marine habitats.
- Consequently, the more difficult it is to cross the boundary elements mentioned above, the 'thicker' the border is, and in the case of their openness, the 'thinner'. (Haselsberger (2014; 510)

As models of “thick border”, among others, Hasselsberger cites examples of the Iron Curtain, as well as the US-Mexico border and the military demarcation line between the two Koreas. The Iron Curtain, which is more familiar to Georgian reality due to its Soviet past, was a difficult border to cross and hindered interaction of any kind between neighboring countries. As a result, the border regions adjacent to the “Iron Curtain” have been characterized, to this day, by the slowing of social, cultural or economic development and therefore high outmigration rates, which have “reduced the vitality” of the bordering regions (Hasselsberger 2014:510).

As for the “thin” borders, unlike the “thick” ones, they entail simplified movement and contact, as for example, the internal borders of the EU zone (the external borders of the EU are “thick” and harder to cross). However, coming from Georgia’s Soviet past, it should be mentioned that borders between republics were undoubtedly “thin”, but after gaining independence, they “thickened” and, in some cases, raised some problematic issues, such as the ongoing demarcation of the David Gareja monastery complex on the Georgia – Azerbaijani borderland.² Given that this issue was less relevant within the Soviet “thin” internal boundaries and acquired a special severity after gaining independence - I believe this is a case where a “thin” border has transformed into a “thicker” one.

2. Historical Background: Spatial Characteristics of Administrative Divisions

2.1. Early modern period

During medieval times, the territory of the Georgian Kingdom was divided into military-administrative territorial units known as ‘Sadroschos’ (literally “of a banner”). According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, there were four large Sadroschos in the 11th-15th centuries:

1. ‘Metsinave’ (“Avant-garde”) – southern Georgia;
2. ‘Memarjvene’ (“Right flank”) – western Georgia;
3. ‘Memartskhene’ (“Left flank”) – territories to the east of the Kartli region (mainly Kakheti and Hereti);
4. ‘Mepis Sadroscho’ (“Royal Sadroscho”) – Shida Kartli.

Sadroschos were led by a military commander, and had their own banners as symbols. These larger Sadroschos incorporated smaller ones called

‘Saeristavos’.³ In battle situations, each army (of 1000 soldiers) brought by Sadroschos represented one military-tactical unit. The number of smaller Sadroschos was much higher, and each of the contingents brought to battle by these saeristavos were led by an Eristavi, who also had his own banner. In special situations, the mobilization of an entire army composed of all Sadroschos would happen quite fast and in battles, each Sadroscho (both large and small) had a specific function to fulfill in terms of tactical maneuvers.

In the 15th century, after the dissolution of a unified Georgia into several kingdoms and principalities, the old military-administrative system disappeared, even though like before, four Sadroschos were established in each of the newly founded political entities; in the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, this reorganization mainly took place during the 1470s, as was probably the case for the Kingdom of Imereti (Suny 1994; Klimiasvili 1964:122-123).

The insignias of a Sadroscho commander were a banner and a sword, which were handed to him by the king during the investment ceremony of the commander. The princes, bishops, landowners, and others living on the territory of the Sadroscho were all put under his authority, and would gather as an army under the commander’s banner. The main duties of the commander were to bring an army during wars, and in times of peace to train and prepare soldiers for battle. Apart from military affairs, the commander also had the duty to resolve small-scale disputes; each year, censuses were carried out according to the Sadroschos in order to determine the population of the Kingdom, the number of soldiers, and of taxpayers; this process was supervised by the commander himself, who also had the responsibility to collect taxes. This function provided him with some administrative rights; on the territory of a Sadroscho, the king was carrying out his administrative plans through the commander, and therefore, the commander also had a police and administrative structure under his command, known as the *iasaulebi*. As a result of all this, one can say the Sadroschos represented both military and civil administrative units (Suny 1994; Meskhia 1948).

A smaller-scale administrative-territorial unit called *temi* is also mentioned in Georgian historical sources since the 11th century; this term was used only to describe a territorial unit, and didn’t convey any military meaning (Topchishvili 2010). The *temi* could also describe a valley, for instance, the valleys of the main rivers found in today’s Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, namely the Liakhvi and Ksani valleys, are not mere geographical terms, but also convey historic-ethnographic meaning. These

temis were themselves divided into smaller *temis*. A *temi* was uniting several villages and had its own icon, had a collective responsibility towards the state and the church, was taking judicial decisions, and had the duty of defending and taking care of roads, collectively owned forests, hayfields, pastures, and arable lands. In Ivane Javakhishvili's 'Historical Map of Georgia' [Javakhishvili, 1923], the whole territory of Georgia is divided into *temis*. On the territory of today's Tskhinvali Region, one could find the *temis* of Gverdis Dziri, Maghran-Dvaleti, Savakhtango, Satskhavato, Zhamuri, Knogho, Ksnis Kheoba, Tskhradzma, Tchurta, and Khepinis Khevi. All these *temis* are comprised in Shida Kartli, which also includes Dvaleti.

From ancient times, from the foundation of the Iberian Kingdom (4th-3rd centuries BC), Dvaleti was an integral part of Georgia, and it is only in 1859 that the Russian authorities made it an administrative part of the Vladikavkaz Oblast. Historical Dvaleti is currently part of the Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia. Historical sources show that Dvaleti and Ossetia are different geographical notions, that the establishment of Ossetians in Dvaleti began in the 15th century, and that this process ended with the assimilation of the Dvaletians in the 17th century. After this, in the second half of the 17th century, Ossetians continued establishing themselves in Georgian villages from Shida Kartli's mountain regions (in the Smaller and Greater Liakhvi valleys), ravaged by the Mongols and emptied of their populations; as a result, in the 1730s, the Ossetian population lives in relatively compact settlements in the upper part of the Liakhvi valley, and more sporadic ones in the upper parts of the Mejudi, Lekhuri, and Ksani valleys (Gvasalia 1983:169-170).

2.2. Territorial and administrative structure under the rule of the Russian Empire

From the beginning of the 19th century, after the annexation of Georgia⁴ by the Russian Empire, territorial and administrative structures changed significantly. As part of the Empire, the country's administrative and territorial structures were arranged according to Russian interests. The whole Caucasus was under the authority of a Governor-General (from 1844, Viceroy) appointed by the Emperor, and just like Russia, it was divided into provinces. These provinces were themselves divided into counties ("*uyezd*"). Apart from that, in some territories that were conquered by Russia relatively late, oblasts were established instead of provinces.

In the parts of provinces where national and religious minorities were dominant, yet other subdivisions (*okrugs*) were created instead of counties (*uyezds*), and they represented special administrative parts of the province. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, a large part of the Georgian territory was included in the provinces of Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Tbilisi's province included the Tbilisi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borchalo, Dusheti, Tianeti, Telavi, and Signaghi *uyezds*, as well as the Zakatali *okrug*, while the Kutaisi province included the Kutaisi, Shorapni, Senaki, Ozurgeti, Zugdidi, Lechkhumi, and Racha *uyezds*, and the Sokhumi, Batumi, and Artvini *okrugs*. Apart from that, part of the Georgian territory was incorporated in the Kars oblast as the Oltisi and Artaani *okrugs*. The villages constituent of a *uyezd* were united in village communities. *Uyezds* also included cities, which represented the administrative centers of their *uyezds*.

After the annexation of the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom in 1802, the establishment of any kind of territorial administrative entity on the territory of today's Tskhinvali region was not on the table for the rulers of the Russian Empire. At that time, the territory in question was divided in two parts – the Gori and the Dusheti *uyezds*. It is however noteworthy that some high-mountain villages of the Tskhinvali Region (Kornisi, Tbeti, Kusireti, Gudisi, Potrisi, Chvrisi, Mghvrisi, Satikhari, Kulbiti, Khromistskaro, Zhamuri, and others) were compactly inhabited by Ossetians, while others (Dzvileti, Sveri, Eredvi, Kordi, Ditsi, Atseriskhevi, Charebi, Snekvi, Beloti, Satskhenisi, Vanati, Vardziaantkari, Mereti, Karbi, Arbo, and others) were mixed, and hosted both Georgian and Ossetian populations (Totadze 2008). Unlike its highlands, the foothills and lowlands of the Tskhinvali region were almost completely inhabited by Georgians. In cities and towns, namely Tskhinvali, Akhagori, and Java, Jews and Armenians were living alongside Georgians.

As noted in subchapter 1.1 for the first time “Ossetia” was used to describe an administrative-territorial entity under the Tiflis Governorate in 1843, when the Ossetian Okrug, was temporarily separated from the Gori Uyezd. In 1858, on the orders of prince and governor Aleksandr Baryatinsky, the Ossetia Okrug was dissolved. From this period, the migration of Ossetians from the Northern Caucasus to the Tskhinvali Region increased in scale, and therefore, the established historic ethno-demographic balance in the Tskhinvali region was transformed due to the increase of the Ossetian population. In addition to this, as a result of the imperial policies purposefully carried out in Georgia, the integration

of newly established Ossetians was taking place not in a Georgian, but a Russian military-political, socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic context, which was fundamentally opposing the already firmly established existing traditions. The logical outcome of all this was the estrangement of the Georgian and Ossetian inhabitants of the Tskhinvali Region, which was often accompanied by armed conflicts.

2.3. Georgia's first democratic republic

The territorial structure of Imperial Russia was preserved during the short independence period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), and in 1919, local elections were held in the uyezd and four large cities of these territorial units. The territorial-administrative arrangement of Georgia was restructured through the constitution approved in 1921: Georgia was divided into 19 units – 18 oblasts and the capital Tbilisi. Apart from small differences, the regions mainly corresponded to the former uyezds. It was also decided to create three autonomous units: 1. The Autonomous Oblast of Abkhazia; 2. Muslim Georgia (modern Batumi region) and 3. Zakatala (nowadays a part of Azerbaijan) but due to the annexation of Georgia by Soviet Russia, these constitutional changes were not actually implemented) (Chyzhevskaya et. Al. 2019) (Losaberidze 2019).

It is worth noting that the first separatist aspirations among the population living in today's South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region appeared right after Georgia freed itself from the rule of the Russian Empire. On the 3rd of July 1919, during one of the meetings of the Commission, created by the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, in charge of defining borders, representatives of the Ossetian National Council stated their decision to create a unified Ossetian Nation (by uniting South and North Ossetia), which would later unite with the Russian Democratic Federal Republic. But because at that stage it could not happen, they were asking the commission for political autonomy within the Georgian borders. The proposed decree ("On the partition of the village communities populated by Ossetians as a separate uyezd", listed the populated areas of the Shorapni, Racha, and Gori uyezds, and suggested that a new administrative unit, the "Java uyezd", should be created by uniting these three districts (Janelidze, 2007: 9; Janelidze, 2018:63; Songhulashvili 2009:97). Their request was not approved, but a joint commission was created with the objective of creating an ethnographic map of the Shorapni, Racha, Dusheti and Gori uyezds, on the basis of which the possibility of

creating a Java uyezd would be discussed, which would include about 1/3 less territory compared to the one provided to the South Ossetia Autonomous Oblast created during the Soviet rule.

This offer did not satisfy the separatist groups, and they openly and actively aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks against the newly independent Georgian Republic. On the 28th of March 1920, the “National Council of South Ossetia” created the “Revolutionary Committee of South Ossetia”, which was asking the Russian Bolsheviks for political autonomy for “South Ossetia”, which led to a significantly tense situation in the region and resulted in violent clashes (Jones 2005; Jones 2014). In 1921, when the Red Army invaded Georgia, they were met as liberators in South Ossetia (Welt 2014; Jishkariani 2017).

2.4. The Soviet Union: creation of South Ossetian AO

Right after the establishment of the Soviet rule, the territorial structure of Georgia changed once again. In 1921-1922, now already in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia (which became part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic⁵), three nominally different autonomous units were created simultaneously: the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), which, until 1931, was part of Georgia with an SSR status according to a special treaty based on federative principles, the Acharan ASSR, and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (“oblast”). According to this territorial-administrative arrangement, “the number of autonomous units in Georgia was greater than in any other Soviet republic apart from the RSFSR, though other republics contained ethnic minorities numerically larger than those in Georgia” (Gachechiladze 2015:84).

On October 31, 1921, the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee passed a resolution according to which South Ossetia received the rights of an autonomous oblast, while the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia was ordered to determine the borders of this autonomy together with the Executive Committee of South Ossetia. In the end, the terms “South Ossetia” and “North Ossetia” became of legal relevance in 1922-24, when, at first, the “South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast” was created by the Central Executive Committee of Georgia and the Council of People’s Commissars through the Decree №2 in April 1922 (Moambe 1922:81-85), and two years later, the North Ossetian ASSR on the territory of Russia in July 1924.

It is worth noting that since the enactment of this decree the precise demarcation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast boundaries has never taken place. Most importantly, it turned out that the non-existence of demarcated boundaries does not only create problems now, in the times of occupation and unilateral “demarcation” - but was also the source of certain ambiguous situations during Soviet times, that sometimes evolved into a source of tension.

This is confirmed by the 1931 unclassified documents from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia found in the National Archives of Georgia. For instance, as one can read in the document “Of disputed lands between the Oni District and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast”,⁶ because of the ambiguity about borders, soon after the creation of the autonomous oblast, administrative disputes occurred regarding lands and took a persistent character – both between local populations and bordering administrative units. Apart from that, the document shows that because of undetermined borders, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast would unilaterally seize bordering territories: *“Because Decree №2 does not give clear indications about demarcation points, these indications were interpreted freely, which led to the seizure by force of certain lands by the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast”*. We also read in the document that in certain cases, the seizure by force of agricultural lands after the creation of the autonomous oblast was a source of daily tension for a long time, but for years the relevant commission could not manage to resolve this issue: “When creating the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, part of the lands that were, since ancient times, cultivated by the farmers of the Oni District, were transferred to the newly created South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. As a result, the rights of the farmers from the Oni District were violated, as the latter could not make use of these lands anymore. This situation became the reason behind violent acts from both sides, sometimes even leading to bloodshed. In order to avoid such undesirable events and disputes between the populations of these districts in the future, commissions including both farmers and governing bodies of the Georgian SSR were created on several occasions, with the objective of clarifying this issue and resolving existing problems. But to this day, no results have stemmed from the work of these commissions”.

The rest of the document describes in detail the disputed parts of the agricultural territories of the villages Ghurshevi, Iri, and Ts’edisi in the Oni District, and once again underlines that “Even according to the legislative

content of the Decree №2, the lands (1941 ha) cultivated by farmers (169 households) from the villages of the Oni District – Iri and Ts'edisi should be assigned to the Oni District, but they were arbitrarily assigned to the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast".⁷

It is worth noting that both the above-mentioned document, in which one can find an open criticism of the Decree №2 (dated 1922) because of the absence of clearly defined borders, and the Decree №2 itself are signed by one and the same man, Filipp Makharadze;⁸ in 1922 as the First Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee, and in 1931, as the head of the Central Executive Committee of the Georgian SSR.

Another interesting discovery from the archive documents is the 1933 resolution passed during a small presidium of the Central Executive Committee of Georgia. During a session held on the 4th of March 1933, it was decided to move the village council center of Stalinisi District from village Satsikhuri to village Tsaghvli. It was the same for villages from the village council of Ali: villages K'odistsq'aro, Chorchana, T'itvinis Ts'q'aro and Lomisa all joined the Ts'aghvli village council. In this case too, the reason behind such decisions was the necessity to delimitate bordering territories that had been absorbed by the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast because of undefined borders.

At this stage, due to the lack of accessibility to the National Archive of Georgia because of COVID-19 regulations, it was not possible to obtain more documentation from the Soviet period related to border changes in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, though there is a high probability for this kind of materials to exist in other periods of the USSR. Apart from that, during the Soviet times, if we disregard minor municipal appropriations of agricultural lands existing on the administrative border, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast did not undergo significant changes.

3. Perception and Experience of B/orderization in Everyday Life

In addition to the historical spatial-administrative analysis of the bordering processes of the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, the qualitative analysis of the fieldwork materials provides a basis for understanding the process of b/orderization along the occupation line from locals' perspectives.

As the subchapters on the historical background of the administrative boundary time-space dynamics showed, administrative boundaries of the currently occupied Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, have never been “thick”. The new reality after the occupation of the region by Russian troops caused previously unexperienced difficulties, even though the conflict in the region started in the early 90’s and Georgia had partially lost control over the territory. Since then, according to official data, Ossetian separatists, with the support of Russia, are carrying out the first so-called demarcation activities using a topographic map issued by the USSR General Staff in 1988, which shows the administrative boundary of 1984 (IDFI 2015). As one out of many local residents recounts, this can be interpreted as the “thickening” of a “thin” border:

BG;⁹ They marked the borders as they were during the Old Ossetian autonomy, the communist one. Who cared about the border then? ... Now, they walk around with GPS. The Russians ... They are doing it, of course! Ossetians assist them as laborers. They walk around together; the Russians do not really consult Ossetians on anything.

BG – Female, 54 years old, village in Gori municipality

In this paper, as mentioned above, I rely on 45 in-depth interviews from the fieldworks conducted in 2019 and 2021. *Figure 1* represents a radar

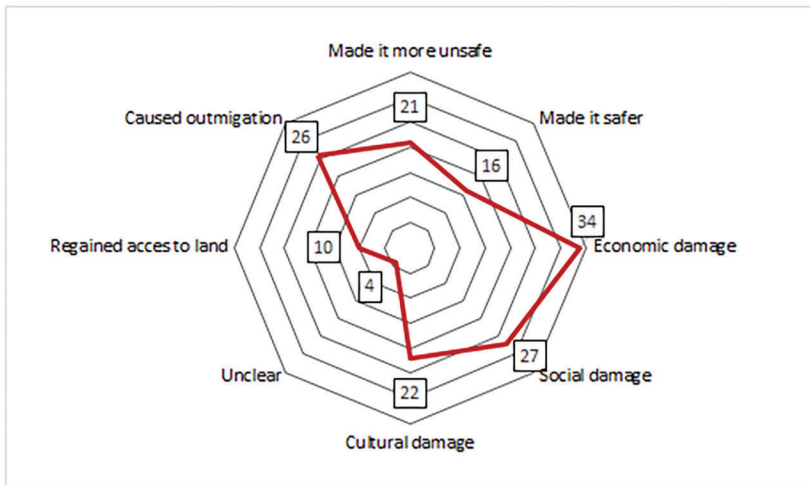


Figure 1. The impact of borderization on daily life according to the interviews

that visualizes the impact of b/orderization on daily life by summarizing the interviews. The majority of the people interviewed emphasize the worsened economic (34), social (27) and cultural (22) situation, which increases the outflow of population from divided villages (26).

At a glance, the feeling of danger (21) and security (16) in their everyday lives seem to be mutually exclusive. However, the analysis of the field materials provided below shows that such perceptions depend on whether the fenced area is close or far to their settlements and to what extent the daily agricultural activities of the locals are affected.

3.1. Alienation

Many interviewees noted that the presence of a physical barrier excludes the possibility to keep contact with the population on the other side of the dividing line. From NM's story, it is clear that since the 2008 war, an intense process of b/orderization of the boundary ("thickening" the "thin border") has become a fertile ground for maintaining constant fear, deepening the alienation and isolation between groups:

From 2008, the Russians forbade us [Georgians and Ossetians] to see each other. However, many Ossetian men have Georgian wives. Also, many Georgians have Ossetian wives. There is one Ossetian family in the village whose daughter got married [before the war] in [Names neighboring occupied village]. Since 2008 it's impossible for her to come here to see her parents. She can only call them by phone, but if something [bad] will happen, **she will have to take a long trip [530km] through Vladikavkaz [Russian Federation], to visit her family who lives just 700 meters away.** But we could go there [neighboring occupied village] without problems before the war. We had one church. We used to celebrate holidays together. We were together in good times and bad ones. We used to invite each other over, but now the church turned out on the other side of the border, so we cannot even pray there anymore. During Shevardnadze's¹⁰ time, we used to live off energy. We went to Znauri's district [currently occupied territory] and brought stuff there. We worked there. We traded there. The people were not fighting. Nowadays, nothing is keeping us together. So many years have passed since the war... The kids have all grown up. They do not know anything about each other anymore."

NM – female, 61 years old, village in Khashuri municipality

Echoing the overwhelming majority of interviewees, NM also notes that, before the 2008 war, relations between the Georgian and Ossetian populations were largely restored, with close socio-economic and cultural ties existing between them. The interviewees also attached particular importance to shared traditional religious practices, thus the dividing lines could not significantly affect these relationships.

The interviewees see the long-term negative impact of ties severed due to borderization primarily in the lack of connection between new generations. According to those interviewed, more than ten years have passed since the borderization has begun, and now the new generations on both sides of the occupation line are growing up in complete isolation from each other, which will hinder the establishment of ties, the restoration of trust, and the ability to coexist in the future. Moreover, they believe that, over time, the elimination of subsequent alienation will become increasingly impossible.

Disrupted social and economic ties are the major disappointing consequences for AK, another interviewee from the split Village in Kareli municipality:

AK: Until the 2005 everything was fine, many of us had Russian car plates. There was trading, transportation of big cargos - we were going to Russia through Tskhinvali without problem. We [Georgians and Ossetians] had very good relationships. Then [in 2005] they closed Ergneti Market,¹¹ but still, until 2008 we used to go there [currently occupied territory] without any problem, and they [Ossetians from the Tskhinvali region] also used to come to us. Until 2008 I used to cultivate my plot of land near the modern "border", there was no problem at all.

I can tell you even more, until 2008, Special Forces from both sides visited me quite often in my previous house [was destroyed in 2008 war], which was close to the "border". We had many Supra [traditional Georgian feast] and great time together. There were even cases when they mixed up their rifle guns and couldn't identify whom it belonged anymore [laughs].

N.L: How is it nowadays? Do you meet the border guards from the other side? Do you communicate?

AK: No, not anymore since they have built those fences. There, where I have a tomato garden, a corner of my plot is cut by the fence. And they walk there several times a day, because they are patrolling the "border". Quite often I used to say "hi" – Zdarova rebyata ["Hello guys" in Russian] to them. I know that soldiers who wear masks are Ossetians, because they

do not want to be identified. Russian soldiers from Vladivostok don't care, they know that after the service they will never meet us anymore. And quite often I tried to keep conversation with them; once I even invited them to drink together; I told them I would bring some wine and they agreed, but when I came back, they were already gone.

NL: Is it forbidden for them?

Of course, it is! Nowadays soldiers would get shot if someone would catch them drinking with me.

AK – male, 44 years old. Village in Kareli municipality.

AK's account also reveals that until 2008, the inhabitants did not experience any difficulties with movement on the territories controlled by the Georgian government and the separatist government of South Ossetia. However, it is important to consider that AK emphasizes not only the restored relationships between civilians but also the trust and close relations between the Georgian and Ossetian military. On the one hand, it testifies to a distinctly high degree of reconciliation, and on the other hand, it reminds us that before the b/orderization began, in the everyday life, the dividing line between the opposing sides was an easily penetrable "thin" boundary which didn't hinder the social, economic, and cultural processes.

3.2. Outmigration

The villages adjacent to the occupation line, not unlike other rural settlements in Georgia, are characterized by a high tendency towards rural-urban migration. For example, according to data from GeoStat, the population of rural settlements in Georgia is decreasing every year. Over the last ten years, the share of the rural population in Georgia has declined from 46.6% to 43.6% (GeoStat 2021). In the villages divided by b/orderization, the new challenges and an even harsher daily reality only add to this, giving rise to depopulation.

Like other interviewees, a 25-year-old young male from village in Gori municipality recalls:

NL: How many people live in this village?

SV: Some went to the city others left the country... There are 20-22 households. This was a combined village. There were up to 60 Georgian-

Ossetian households. But, after the war, no one could last here. Some houses burnt down. The Ossetian houses burned during the first war, next came the Georgian ones. Then, many left their homes altogether. Some sold them and moved to the city. It is completely empty now. You cannot see children in the village. We can go for a walk together. I bet you, we will not see any kids. I am 25 years old. There are only two men my age here.

NL: Why did they leave? What was their main reason?

SV: I do not know... It is a poor village. We lost all our pastures, so we lost the cattle too. Plus, the settlement is right near the border. Our gardens are literally on the border. The Russians are always here. You never know what can happen. They might be a little drunk... You never know how they will act. "Come here!" and then they will catch you or even shoot you straight away. We are always scared.

SV - male, 25 years old, village in Gori municipality

It becomes apparent from SV's account that the increase in outmigration is directly related to the specific economic hardships produced by b/orderization. First and foremost, the restrictions of access to agricultural lands must be mentioned, which, similarly to the village of SV, poses a significant problem for all divided settlements, frequently resulting in the disappearance of entire agricultural branches (in this case, animal husbandry).

Besides the economic hardships, the interviewees invariably point out the daily safety concerns and, like SV, underline the constant psychological pressure and insecure living environment. Following Haselsberger's concept of thick border, in addition to the slowing of social, cultural, or economic development discussed in the previous subsection, the situation caused by b/orderization stimulates migration (especially among young people), which induces the depopulation of villages close to the occupation line.

3.3. Double-edged consequences

The most fascinating and unexpected finding, based on the analysis of the fieldwork materials, is the dual perception of the b/orderization process by the locals (see Figure 1). On the one hand, for all interviewees, as well as according to the prevalent discourse in Georgia, b/orderization is unequivocally associated with an attempt at annexation, which involves, as I mentioned in the previous subsections, severed socio-economic ties,

increased threats, illegal arrests, and restriction of access to residential and agricultural property. Nonetheless, given the spatial context, inhabitants of the villages where the Russian military have erected fences talk about double-edged benefits, noting an enhanced sense of security they experience in their daily lives. For example, 52-year-old DT describes the consequent situation as follows:

NL: Do you own cattle?

DT: yes, but pasture lands were taken away (occupied) and it became very hard. Nowadays, **areas which have been enclosed are much safer**, there **we can pasture our cows without fear – we know that cattle cannot cross the fence and won't get kidnapped**. But we can't explain to cattle that some areas are uncontrolled and now they will need a visa to go there [laughs]. **When it [cattle] will overstep you have to follow and then both of you will be arrested and will have to pay the fine to get free.**

NL: How much is the fine?

DT: As we were told, now it has become 800GEL [≈254EUR] – it got very expensive recently. Until now it was 2000RUB [≈30EUR]. But you know, they have expenses as well – they take you on “excursion” to Tskhinvali for 3-4 days and have to provide bed and food for you [laughs].

NL: So, does it mean that it's safer with the border fences?

DT: **God knows it's hard for me to admit that, but unfortunately that's the reality we are in. If it would be enclosed, then they [Russian troops] wouldn't be allowed to kidnap us.** Besides that, now, **in the areas where they put fences - not a single meter of land is left unsown.** Russians even keep warning us to keep at least a 50-meter distance from the fence, but we do not care anymore. On the other hand, here [territory without fences or clear “border” signs] **we cannot access our plots in the radius of at least 500 meters, because we do not know till where we are allowed to go.**

DT - male, 52 years old, village in Kareli municipality

As we see from DT's narrative, despite the severe consequences of b/orderization, residents near the occupation line often think that getting close to fenced territories will not necessarily harm them, in contrast territories without physical barrier. According to the people from the same village in the Kareli district, if there was a physical barrier on the rest of the surrounding area of the settlement, not only would their daily lives become safer (since arrests and kidnapping due to them crossing

the “border” and their fear of losing their cattle will decrease), but their access to agricultural land will increase due to unimportance of keeping a “buffer zone” of 350-500 meters (see map 3).

As an excerpt from a later interview demonstrates, the inhabitants of the villages of the Khashuri municipality are forced to live in conditions similar to those of the Kareli municipality:

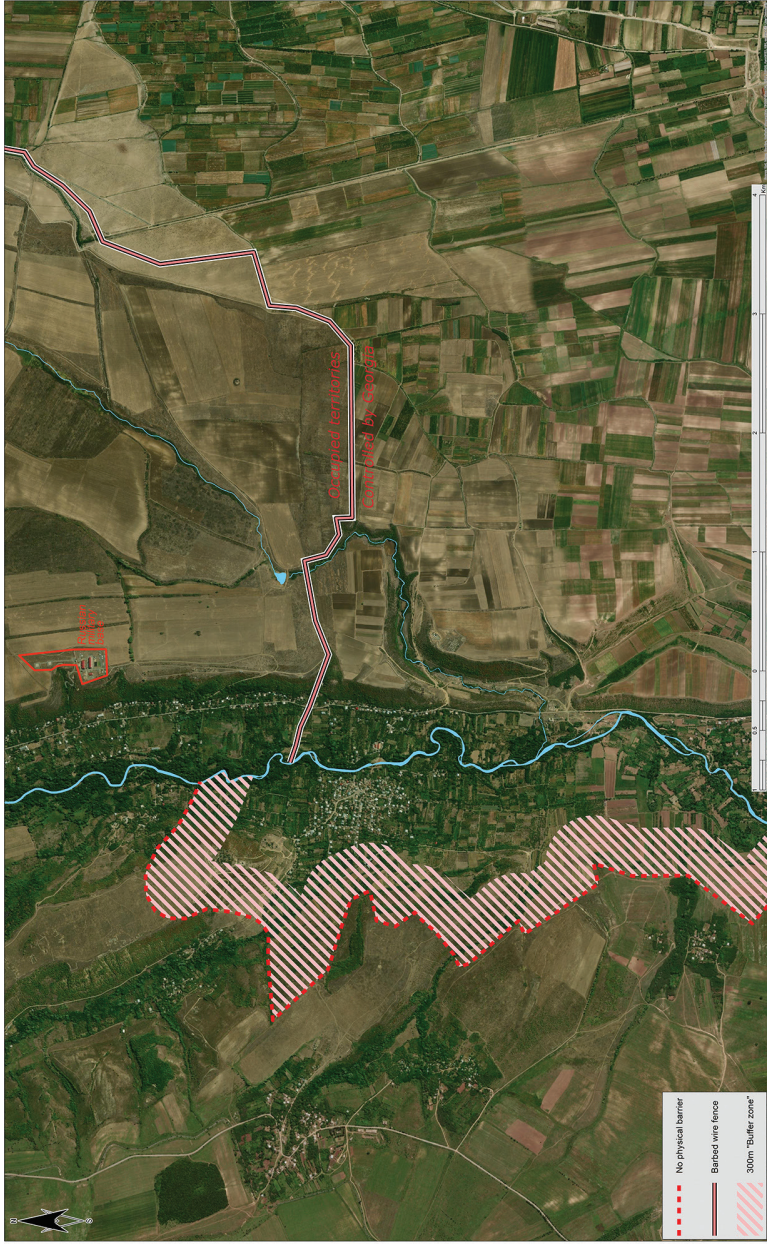
NL: How do you orientate in the areas where there are no clear signs or fences?

GM: **There are few places with signs, but for the rest we simply know that it’s dangerous to cross the rill, or after some trees or rocks it’s not safe to go, even though it is still our territory and what they call the “border” is 300 or 500 meters away.** Also, for example, there are paths where Russian soldiers regularly patrol with their dogs. So, we see it and therefore avoid it. Also, our police warn us regularly about it, too. **For example, this territory is not enclosed [shows on the map], so whenever I have to work in my garden, I have to ask [Georgian] policemen to come together with me and guard me.** They are very kind, always ready to help us. They keep telling us that we can work as long as we want, even till very late, but we must inform them before we go there, so as not to get kidnapped.

GM - Male, 64, village in Khashuri municipality

This portion of the interview with GM also clearly illustrates the precarious situation that accompanies daily life in the vicinity of the occupation line. When inhabitants move in areas that lack any proper signs or physical barriers, they risk, at best, imprisonment, and at worst, their own lives. Furthermore, the occupation line that is not clearly marked also forms a so-called buffer zone or a no man’s land within a radius of 300-500 meters, restricting access of each adjacent settlement to at least tens of hectares of agricultural land.

Against a backdrop of the grueling day-to-day life caused by b/orderization, the section of the fenced occupation line certainly brings a degree of clarity and security to the local population. However, according to them, it is a double-edged benefit, and when making an assessment, they have to choose the lesser of two evils, as it is clear to them that the erection of physical barriers further isolates the occupied region, and that the creation of a “thick border” is a sign of its annexation.



Map 3. Example of b/orderization in Dvani, Kareli municipality (compiled by the author)

4. Conclusion

At this stage of the study, it is clear that since 2008 the former administrative boundary, which was only a dashed line on a map, has become a strictly militarized physical barrier. According to the theoretical framework mentioned above, this process is evidently fitting the concept of transformation of “thin” boundaries into “thick” ones. As a result, intense b/orderization has become an insurmountable barrier for locals and leads to the severance of the longstanding socio-cultural and economic ties since already more than twelve years.

The new reality implemented by Russia in this region became a fertile ground for maintaining constant fear and deepening alienation and isolation between groups living on both sides of the occupation line. This situation stimulates outmigration (especially of the younger generation), which causes depopulation of the border-adjacent settlements. Most importantly, as the findings show - despite the difficult social, economic and cultural consequences, people living near the occupation line often perceive b/orderisation as a double-edged process, beneficial in the sense that it ensures their safety in everyday life.

Undoubtedly, in the long-term perspective, the post-2008 situation is causing irreparable damage to Georgian-Ossetian relations and bars any possibility of initiating any sort of constructive process. Meanwhile, new generations are growing up on both sides of the dividing line, alienated from each other.

However, attention should be paid to the fact that people on both sides of the occupation line still try to cross it to access land, to visit family, to trade, for health reasons, other socio-economic benefits, or simply to visit cemeteries and other religious sites at the risk of their own safety. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with ongoing b/orderisation processes analytically as much as practically.

NOTES

- ¹ The first Russian governmental newspaper in Transcaucasia, 1828-1833. At first, it was printed in both Russian and Georgian languages; Farsi was added in 1829. The newspaper published articles about the war, governmental decrees and communications, various pieces of news “of interest to this region”, and in general, any text required by the government.
- ² 6th century Georgian orthodox monastery complex. Part of it is located on the Azerbaijan–Georgia border, /which causes a border dispute between the two countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union/regaining the independence
- ³ Territorial unit in medieval Georgia, which was ruled by an Eristavi (duke).
- ⁴ The annexation of Georgian Kingdoms and principalities by Russian Empire started from 1801 by annexing Kartli-kakheti kingdom. By 1867 Russia annexed the last Georgian principality of Samegrelo.
- ⁵ A soviet republic in the years 1922-1936 formed by the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani Republics, as well as the Abkhazia SSR in 1922-1931.
- ⁶ National Archives of Georgia, Department of Central Archive of Contemporary History - Fund 284, catalogue 1, doc. N 1979. pages 1-23.
- ⁷ The document has an annex that presents schematic maps of the territories in question, but unfortunately the annex is not preserved at the Georgian National Archives.
- ⁸ Filipp Makharadze (1868-1941), a Georgian Bolshevik, revolutionary, communist party figure, and active opponent of the first Georgian Democratic Republic.
- ⁹ While presenting interview excerpts, I chose to assign random acronyms to interviewees, thus placing them on equal footing with myself (NL).
- ¹⁰ Eduard Shevardnadze – the Chairman of the State Council of Georgia in 1992-1995; 2nd president of Georgia in 1995-2003.
- ¹¹ The market, active from 1996 to 2004 in the village of Ergneti, near the town of Tskhinvali, was an important trading post for the Georgian and Ossetian population. At the same time, it was one of the sources of shadow economy, wherein the smuggled food items, petroleum products, cigarettes, and particularly large quantities of wheat and flour produced in Russia, entered the territory of Georgia through the Tskhinvali region. Cases of drug and arms trafficking were also frequent. The market was closed in 2004 by the decision of the Georgian government.

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