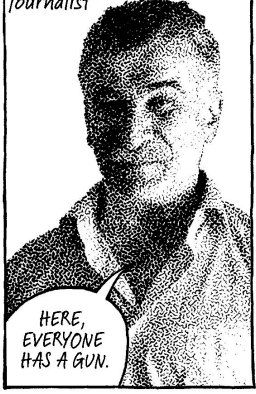


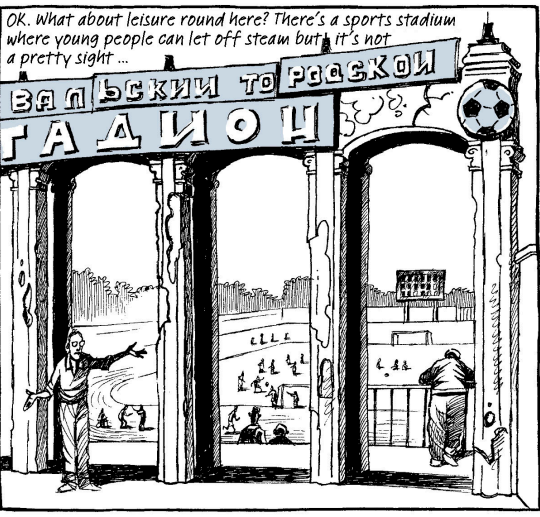
The country has one opposition paper, 21st Century. Circulation: 1,000. In charge: Timur Tzkhovrebvo, a self-proclaimed "combatant and journalist"



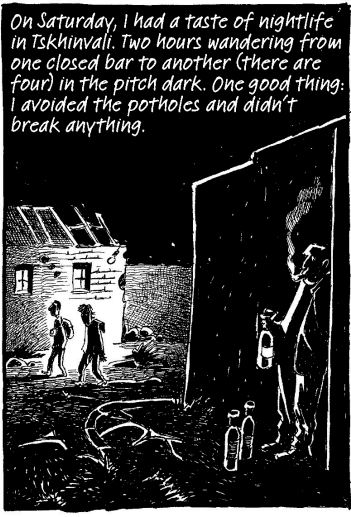
HERE, EVERYONE HAS A GUN.



IT'S SAD TO SEE BUILDINGS DESTROYED. BUT THERE IS MORE TO BUILD - A REAL CIVIL SOCIETY.



OK. What about leisure round here? There's a sports stadium where young people can let off steam but it's not a pretty sight ...



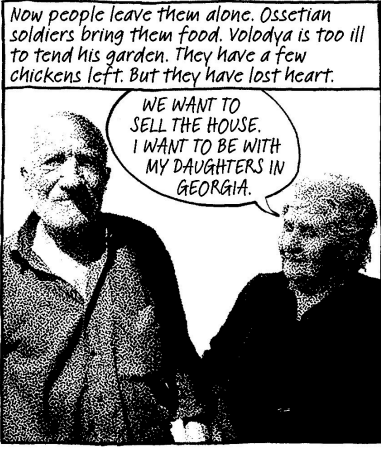
On Saturday, I had a taste of nightlife in Tskhinvali. Two hours wandering from one closed bar to another (there are four) in the pitch dark. One good thing: I avoided the potholes and didn't break anything.



Apart from Russians, the only foreigners in Tskhinvali are from the international Red Cross. The people they are helping include a few elderly Georgians who have stayed put. So far.



Natasha and Volodya, for example. They were born here and are attached to the house that they built themselves. Despite being beaten up by young Ossetians, despite the raids.



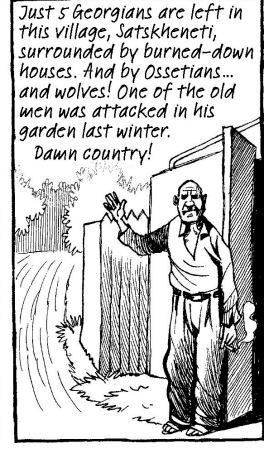
Now people leave them alone. Ossetian soldiers bring them food. Volodya is too ill to tend his garden. They have a few chickens left. But they have lost heart.

WE WANT TO SELL THE HOUSE. I WANT TO BE WITH MY DAUGHTERS IN GEORGIA.



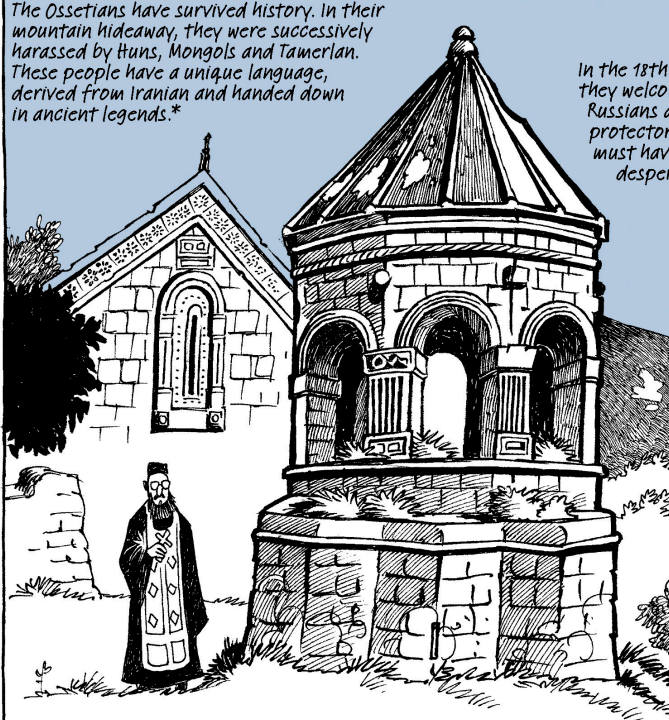
The first floor has been closed off since the day when Volodya's and Natasha's son took his life there.

He didn't want to fight his neighbours.



Just 5 Georgians are left in this village, Satskheneti, surrounded by burned-down houses. And by Ossetians... and wolves! One of the old men was attacked in his garden last winter. Damn country!

3/3 @ Chappatte in Le Temps, Geneva, August 2009 / cartoons@globecartoon.com / RIGHTS RESERVED



The Ossetians have survived history. In their mountain hideaway, they were successively harassed by Huns, Mongols and Tamerlan. These people have a unique language, derived from Iranian and handed down in ancient legends.*

In the 18th century they welcomed the Russians as their protectors. They must have been desperate.

The idea of genocide preys on the Ossetian mind. One day my guide asked me about Western indifference. His serious opinion: "WITHOUT THE RUSSIANS, WE WOULD HAVE BEEN MASSACRED AND EUROPE WOULD HAVE SAID NOTHING."

I wanted to protest but no words came.



*The legends of the Narts, warriors who were half human and half divine and very keen on parties.

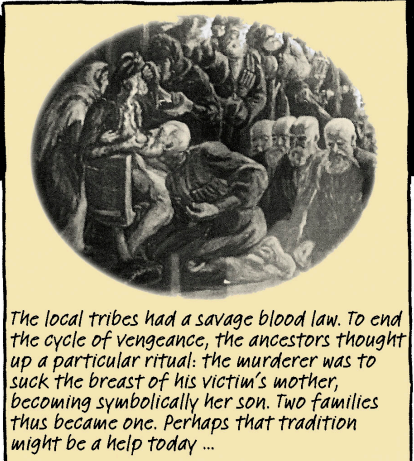
Is reconciliation with Georgia still possible? Do the two Ossetias, the independent south and the Russian north, dream of unification?



GEORGIA AND OSSETIA ARE JUST OBJECTS. WE ARE BEING USED.

IT'S RUSSIA VERSUS THE USA.

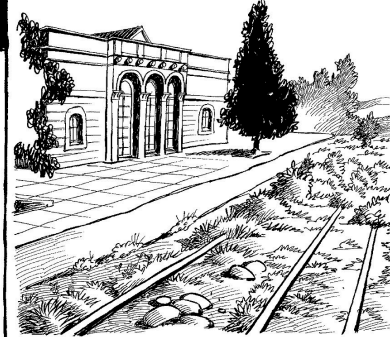
Marat Mindzaev, law professor in Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia)



The local tribes had a savage blood law. To end the cycle of vengeance, the ancestors thought up a particular ritual: the murderer was to suck the breast of his victim's mother, becoming symbolically her son. Two families thus became one. Perhaps that tradition might be a help today ...

This country was once part of the world. Trains left Tskhinvali station for Tbilisi and the Black Sea.

The last train left the station in 1989.



CHAPPATTE
OSSETIA, JUNE 2009
GENEVA, JULY 2009
WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
www.ourworld-yourmove.org

P.S. In fact, Tskhinvali is pronounced "tsrinvali" - with a short guttural "v". But watch out! The final "i" is Georgian; Ossetians don't pronounce it.