

ISCKMC 2022**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****WORLD WAR II IN THE MEMORY POLITICS OF MODERN
GEORGIA**

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Abstract

The older generation is distinguished by inclusiveness in the common memorial space of the USSR and commitment to participation in the Great Patriotic War. Georgian youth demonstrates a rejection of the common historical memory with Russia and the entire Soviet legacy, preferring to have in common with the commemorative space associated with the Second World War. The paper discusses that historical memory camouflages many memorial conflicts, contributing to the memorization of dramatic episodes (recent or old) using the past in the present, in which old grievances, hatred, and a suppressed sense of retribution are reactivated. The study aims to identify the key contradictions associated with the implementation of the modern policy of memory of Georgia and commemoration of the Great Patriotic War / World War II. The article describes some examples of the dual perception of the historical past of the Second World War. The results show that the paradigm shift from the common Soviet past to its complete denial in Georgia was accompanied by a rapid politicization of historical memory. The rejection of Soviet doctrine has led to a lack of reconciliation with the past. There was a transformation of the memory of the Great Patriotic War into the memory of the Second World War and the minimization or exaggeration of the role of the Georgian population in it.

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1. Introduction

Wars and armed conflicts can leave wounds in the form of memories not only in the individual but also in collective memory. This prevents the reconciliation of the warring parties. Collective memory has become part of the state's national politics and national identity (Renan, 1990). However, many researchers ignore the socio-psychological characteristics of the individual or collective memory that underlie the concept of the “wound of a history”. The concept is developed in the works of foreign authors in connection with the perpetuation of the memory of World War II in particular in Germany (Zehfuss, 2007). The “wounds of the past” associated with territorial conflicts are felt most acutely and persist for a long time even after the official stage of conflict resolution (Goryushina, 2021).

2. Problem Statement

The paper discusses that historical memory camouflages many memorial conflicts, contributing to the memorization of dramatic episodes (recent or old) using the past in the present, in which old grievances, hatred, and a suppressed sense of retribution are reactivated. In this case, the state is the key actor that plays a significant role in creating a shared or divisive narrative about the past (Drozdewski et al., 2019). The politics of memory involves the development of such a course of using historical memory, which is “actively used by the ruling elites of various countries to mobilize society and retain power, to achieve foreign policy goals” (Skachkov, 2017, p. 140).

Georgia has identified cooperation with the EU and the US as fundamental in the post-Soviet period, having completely severed diplomatic and political relations with Russia in 2008 after the armed conflict in South Ossetia. Since that period, relations between the two states have been based on the active use of the historical past (the Soviet period, the political legacy of which is partially or completely rejected in modern Georgia) and various implementations of the politics of memory. In Russia the politics of memory is centered around the 1945 victory in the Great Patriotic War, the in Georgia collective memory is ambivalent. The older generation is distinguished by inclusiveness in the common memorial space of the USSR and commitment to participation in the Great Patriotic War. Georgian youth demonstrates a rejection of the common historical memory with Russia and the entire Soviet legacy, preferring to have in common with the commemorative space associated with the Second World War.

3. Research Questions

The paper deals with the questions about what place in the politics of memory of modern Georgia is given to the memory of the Great Patriotic War and World War II, and what are the contradictions of its manifestation. The article also studies whether there are legislative acts directly or indirectly restricting the use of the historical past of Georgia.

4. Purpose of the Study

Our aim with this paper was to identify the key contradictions associated with the implementation of the modern politics of memory of Georgia and commemoration of the Great Patriotic War / World War II.

5. Research Methods

The article presents the results of a content analysis of several English-language and Russian-language studies on the perception of the Great Patriotic War in modern Georgia, the implementation of the politics of memory, and interaction with the historical past of the USSR period. The paper summarizes the data of field research conducted by the author on the territory of Georgia in the period from 2018 to 2019, in 2020 and 2021 using various messengers and blitz interviews with historians, experts in the field of studying the Soviet past and its perception in Georgia, and activists “The Immortal Regiment of Georgia”.

6. Findings

Consideration of the role and place of the Second World War in the politics of memory of modern Georgia is connected with relations with Russia, as well as the political decision of Tbilisi to be associated with the European Union and, as a result, with the European memory space (Radonić, 2017).

Studies on this topic appear even in the period of the end of perestroika. In 1988, the work of the American historian Suny “Creating the Georgian Nation” (1988) was published. The author analyzes the results of the actions of the Soviet government in the context of relations between Russia and Georgia. In 2001, the scientist again returns to this topic, but already builds his reasoning around the thesis about the contradiction between the historical past and the new political realities that the post-Soviet states are facing. According to his point of view, in most of these states a political hierarchy started to appear, in which the titular nation developed a sense of owning a republic, and other ethnic groups, except for Russians, were not entitled to the same advantages. “Such a policy was especially egregious in Georgia, where Abkhazians and Ossetians were discriminated against” (Suny, 2001, p. 867). This affected the claim to the right to own the national history and to the role and participation in the Great Patriotic War / World War II.

The amount of research work is increasing in the first decade of the 21st century, especially after the armed conflict in South Ossetia in 2008, also known as the Five Day War. This conflict gave Georgia an impetus to integrate its history more into the European historical space and to reject the Soviet legacy.

Most of the English-language historiographic sources practically do not pay attention to the relationship between the modern political narrative and historical memory in relations between Russia and Georgia. They are usually limited to conclusions in the field of international relations and brief practical recommendations for global and regional actors interested in the South Caucasus region. At the same time, Russian-language academic research, which is fragmentary, nevertheless touches on certain

aspects of the study of narratives about the war and the role of memory in modern Russian-Georgian interaction (Garibashvili, 2014; Negrov, 2007).

The question of the transformation of the political narrative as a tool for fixing historical memory after the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992 is addressed by Chhaidze (2016), Doctor of Philology and researcher at the Ruhr University. The scientist analyzes post-Soviet literary sources about the relationship between people taking part in an armed conflict, and their pre-war, pre-war, or post-war everyday life. The authors also pay attention to how the political narrative about memory has changed in the context of interethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Chhaidze & Lekke, 2018).

Under the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War, which was traditional for the country's memory space, was actively destroyed (Wertsch & Batiashvili, 2011). This was manifested, among other things, in the radical destruction of monumental objects in Georgia. In particular, on December 19, 2009, at the initiative of Saakashvili, a Soviet military monument, the Memorial of Glory, was demolished in Kutaisi. The explosion killed a woman and her eight-year-old daughter. As part of a campaign to develop cities outside of Tbilisi, Saakashvili planned to build a new Georgian parliament building on the site of this memorial. The symbolism of this act was to be strengthened by the fact that the original date of the demolition of the monument coincided with Saakashvili's birthday (December 21). However, the 46-meter arch was destroyed on December 19, due to an attempt by the country's leadership to avoid public scrutiny and significant resonance. The monument was reminiscent of the killing of a dragon by Saint George (an armed rider hit a German soldier with a knife).

However, the main ideological field of struggle related to the differences in the commemoration of the Great Patriotic / World War II in Tbilisi is Victory Day. Those in Georgia who celebrate Victory Day on May 9 are automatically equated with the pro-Russian segment of Georgian society and are associated with the "Immortal Regiment of Georgia". Anti-Russian citizens of Georgia do not participate in the annual actions of the Immortal Regiment. The older generation expresses concern about the intentional weakening of the decisive role of the USSR in the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Georgian authorities and the lack of proper disrespect for the memory of the Georgians who died in this war. The opposing group believes that Soviet flags and slogans insult the victims of Soviet repression and the Georgians killed in the fight against Russian imperialism (Lomsadze, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictive measures were introduced in Georgia, which did not involve mass marches on the occasion of Victory Day on May 9, 2020. The decision of the leadership of the "Immortal Regiment of Georgia" to hold a public action in Vake Park, the former Victory Park, where the monument to the Unknown Soldier is located, violated the state of emergency and the curfew in Tbilisi. According to the restrictive measures introduced in the Georgian capital, it was forbidden to organize gatherings with more than three people. Also, the members of the Immortal Regiment of Georgia intended to use Soviet symbols, which are prohibited by law in the country (Malkin, 2020), the Charter of Freedom (2011) (MatSne, 2013).

This law prescribes a restriction on the use of Soviet symbols on the territory of Georgia up to a complete ban. The implementation of the Freedom Charter led to the following consequences:

- a long-term process of rejecting the memory of the Great Patriotic War as an event related to the period of the USSR and, therefore, subject to a ban, has begun,
- In 2011, a campaign was initiated to rename various monumental objects built during the Soviet period. This was since the Charter did not allow the use of the names of Soviet and communist figures and references to communist ideology in geographical names.

As a result of the above, the memory space of Georgia has undergone significant changes. The historical memory of the Great Patriotic War is being transformed into the memory of the Second World War, which is in line with Georgia's political course of integration with the European Union.

The analysis of the Charter of Freedom revealed the presence in the law of an amendment regulating the assessment necessary for deciding on the subsequent renaming of objects of monumental memory in Georgia (bas-relief, stele, or monument). Each municipality is obliged to form a special commission. The symbol of the Soviet era will not be destroyed if this commission determines that the monumental object is a work of art and has artistic value. In this case, the object can be transferred to the Occupation Museum in Tbilisi or its branch in Gori.

The Museum of Soviet Occupation was founded on May 26, 2006, based on the archives of the Georgian Security Service. The author of the first exhibition was Rurua, former Minister of Culture of Georgia (2009–2012), a member of the political council of the United National Movement. The exposition consists of a glass stele with the names of repressed Georgians during the Soviet era. The concept of the museum was worked out by theater director Tskhadadze. He believed that the purpose of the exhibition was to introduce the visitor to the historical past of the Soviet period in Georgia. It is depicted in the form of an endless martyrology of the Georgian intelligentsia, containing the name, date of death, circumstances of martyrdom, in rare cases, along with a photograph.

The Museum of Soviet Occupation contains more than 3,000 exhibits, ending with a map of modern Georgia with the inscription "Occupation continues", with Abkhazia and South Ossetia highlighted in red.

From June 26 to October 31, 2015, the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia hosted a short-term exhibition dedicated to the role of Georgia in World War II. The exhibition was dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the victory over fascism. Among the key exhibits of the exhibition is a letter from the poet Chikovani in the name of Colonel-General Leselidze, orders and awards of Leselidze, medal of honor of Lieutenant General and Hero of the Soviet Union Janjgava, the uniform of Georgian generals and officers, as well as the unique flags of Georgian partisans who fought in France and Italy.

The maritime section of the exposition was represented by a model of the famous submarine M-111 (Baby) of the 3rd division of the Black Sea Fleet submarine brigade. She actively participated in the Great Patriotic War. Also at the museum exhibition were presented the flight suit and equipment of the captain of the Soviet Army, Hero of the USSR Dzhabidze. He made 274 combat missions, and participated in 64 air battles, in which he shot down 22 enemy aircraft personally and two more as part of a group.

Among 250 rare items from the 2015 exposition in Tbilisi, one could find Stalin and an ivory vase specially made for his fiftieth birthday.

Despite the official policy of memory regarding the de-Sovietization of Georgia, the memory of Stalin and his symbolism is still ambivalent. The Museum of Joseph Stalin in the city of Gori functions in the memorial space of modern Georgia. In 2008, the Minister of Culture of Georgia, Vacheishvili, announced the expansion of the exposition of the Stalin Museum, dedicated to “Russian aggression” by analogy with the museum in Prague, the Museum of KGB repressions in Lithuania and Estonia. The Gori Municipal Assembly voted to end plans to change the museum's contents on December 20, 2012 (Sheremet, 2008).

The ambiguity in the implementation of the politics of memory of the Second World War is also manifested in the fact that the memorial space of the Stalin Museum also houses the unique Museum of Military Glory. It was created by the efforts of the honorary citizen of nine cities of Czechoslovakia Candareli. A participant in the Great Patriotic War, a retired colonel of the guard, began to create a museum within the walls of his communal apartment. Subsequently, the museum was transferred to a specially designated room near the Stalin House Museum. This was facilitated by the support of the population of the city and the region, as well as the efforts of other participants in the Great Patriotic War. The general idea of the exposition is the protection of the homeland. The specifics of the new memorial space, which includes both the Stalin Museum and the Museum of Military Glory, is that the name of the museum in Georgian and Russian reflects the real name of the museum (Museum of Military Glory), but in the new English sign, it is already a The War Museum.

7. Conclusion

This paper has clearly shown that the paradigm shift from a common Soviet past to its complete denial in Georgia was accompanied by a rapid politicization of historical memory. This rejection of Soviet doctrine led to a lack of reconciliation with the past. At the same time, there was a transformation of the memory of the Great Patriotic War into the memory of the Second World War and the minimization or exaggeration of the role of the Georgian population in it.

The process of reconciling with a painful historical past requires confronting the hard facts of it. This is the first step towards its acceptance. It is also important to stop denying the historical past. In a country that glorifies the worst of times and downplays the memory of the Great Patriotic War and its simultaneous transformation into the memory of the Second World War, politics of memory can become the work of individuals who will be able to begin their process of exposing the truth and reconciling with the past (Epplee, 2019).

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