

Escape from Being Provincial: Transformation of the Political Memory in the Urban Landscape of Gori

Abstract

After the transitional turmoil following the civil war at the beginning of 1990's, Georgia attempted to rebuild its own national identity in the wake of the ambiguous role of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet state. Georgia's historiographic mnemonic reconstruction was deeply revitalized by glorious moments connected to the popular and scientific discourses of the Georgian Renaissance period of the 12th and 13th centuries. The main streets of Georgian cities and towns were renamed with national heroes such as Queen Tamar, Tsar David Aghmashenebeli or the poet Shota Rustaveli. Meanwhile, numerous monuments were constructed during this historical period. Consequently, the politics of history and the memory of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921) were strongly avoided in discourse. In the same way, the Soviet period was rejected and presented in a pejorative light. However, Soviet nostalgia created an unofficial counter-memory discourse. Taking the town of Gori as a sample, through visual anthropology methods and in-depth interviews, this article aims to describe the role of the Soviet past in Georgia's national identity today. In a critical analysis highlighting the clash between official and popular discourses, this paper will attempt to answer the question of whether the ambiguous place of Soviet era memories could be considered a barrier for identity unification, as in the case of Gori, and also in a broader sense, for the Georgian state as a whole.

Keywords: cultural memory, urban studies, visual anthropology, Joseph Stalin, Gori, Post-Socialism

Introduction

Post-socialist studies attempt to discover new perspectives to describe and analyse the states that were formed after the collapse of the last empire, the Soviet Union. State-building processes, identities and cultural reconstructions, together with mnemonic processes and politics of history seem to

be markedly different in comparison to those which took place in the states created after the dissolution of the French and British empires. Consequently, Chris Hann argues that the most useful tool for analysis of cultural transition and transformation within the scope of social anthropology are postcolonial theories aware of their limitations in the Post-Soviet world (Hann 2007, 4-6).

The theoretical range of this paper aims to analyse the detailed elements of identity in the ongoing state-building and nation-building processes in the post-imperial town of Gori. My main concern will be connected with the legacy of the past and the heritage of the Soviet period in comparison with new paths of memory created after 2008. Gori is an interesting case due to a specific heritage strongly associated with the person of Joseph Stalin. Despite of the scale and provincial character of Gori, the town is a notable example of the ambiguous nature of verbalization regarding the Soviet legacy in Georgia. Using the examples of various places of commemoration, museums, as well as the results of an anthropological experiment and personal interviews the paper will try to describe the cultural persistent clash between the official state-driven memory politics with the popular or common approaches to the past. This analysis should lead us to answer whether



Museum of Stalin, Gori. © B. Krzysztan.¹

the ambiguous place of memory of the Soviet period might be considered an obstacle for a politically-motivated creation of an integrated model of identity, in case of Gori, and then in the broader context of Georgia.

How does the Soviet past exist in the memory discourse and state-driven politics of history in the urban case of Gori? One hypothesis is that after 2008, a new discourse arose in Georgia regarding the Soviet period, which can be defined as counter-discourse to collective memory.

Another is that the ambiguous approach to the past seems to be a barrier to a politically motivated creation of an integrated model of reconstructed identity.

Methodological and Theoretical Framework and Description of Sources

As stated previously, this paper looks at the nostalgia and approaches to the Soviet past in a comparative perspective on two levels of social consciousness and discourse: 1. From the level of collective and cultural memory. 2. From the level of state-driven (often propagandistic) blueprints of historical politics. The bases for qualitative research are taken from primary sources like photographs and in-depth, unstructured or biographical, interviews (Kaufmann 2010). Therefore, two main anthropological tools are used – contemporary visual ethnography methods and interview interpretation (Becker 1986; Pink 2006; Banks 2001, 87-99; 2006, 305-321). As a supportive source, participation observation based on the experimental ethnographic tools will be described (Stoddart 1986, 103-121; Berg and Lune 2012, 217-221). Nonetheless, some limitations of such an approach have to be taken into consideration. Dona Schwartz' photographs should not be treated as full sources, but rather as raw material which has to be joined with the context of anthropological research (Schwartz 1989, 119-121). Hence, in this paper the visual sources are supported with interviews, accompanied by the broader context constructed from media content as critical analysis. The main consideration is not to focus excessively on the question of What do the portrayed places look like?, But rather on What is the sense of having them and how are they influencing a social attitude connected with memory and the politics of history? I am analysing the semiotics (the connection between different codes – spoken and visible, and unspoken) of particular pictures to answer the question, How are different portrayed places important for habitualization? (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Chandler 2007, 148-157). In his context,

the politics of history could be described as a part of urban policy in both analysed examples.

Urban critical theory is considered as broadly as possible. Alan Harding and Talja Blokland described it as following “a body of ideas explaining one or more aspects of reality within, or of, towns and cities” (Harding and Blokland 2014, 19–20). It has to be said that in the context of memory, the “urban” should be treated more abstractly: within a critical perspective, in which the core sphere of analysis is the actor-space interaction. (Brenner 2009, 198–207). Professional and amateur “carriers of memory” (interviews) have been analysing everyday contacts with commemoration places and counter-memory examples (photographs). For this paper, the “body of ideas” are contradictory memory discourses about Soviet legacy that remain an obstacle for the creation of a united identity project within the urban policy of Gori. As Erik Meyer highlighted after Edgar Wolfrum: “By defining “politics of history” as a political domain – whereby different actors not only seek to provide history with their specific interests, but also use it for their political benefit – Wolfrum follows the pejorative sense of the term: it often serves to mark a political-instrumental way of dealing with history and historiography which aims to influence contemporary debates” (Meyer 2010, 176). What is important in the discursive dialogue between memory and politics of history in the case of Gori is the fact that this usage of the politics of history seems to be especially noticeable. This element plays a decisive role for city officials. What the interviews highlighted is that the politics of memory about Joseph Stalin are under permanent discussion and reconstruction in Gori. Explicitly the authorities do not express the importance of the Stalin for politics of history in the town. Stalin and his museum are rather described as a “brand,” which allows the municipality to develop tourism in the city. Nonetheless the analysis of the interviews shows the political manipulation behind every single activity connected with the museum. Hence, it might be useful to present the definition of politics of memory as broadly as it possible. Richard Ned Lebow (2006, 5) wrote:

Those [mnemonic – B.K] discourses and their contents in turn, are generally the creation of elites and counter-elites, who use them to justify themselves and to advance their political, economic and social goals. It is a top down and a bottom up process. Both ways, and at every level, the construction of memory is infused by politics

What is the memory in the post-socialist town where Joseph Stalin was born? Obviously, those elements, which are visible should be considered;

elements that create the spaces which might be called “les lieux de mémoire” (Nora 1989, 7-24). In the fundamental work for memory studies however, Maurice Halbwachs emphasized the question of the invisible and the discursive in the description and analysis of memory structures and mechanisms in the societies and entities at crossroads (Halbwachs 1992, 46-53). The opportunity to include these examples of counter-memory and clashes of contradictory discourses is possible thanks to interviews and participation observation. Despite this, Michel Foucault’s idea to accentuate as to whether this “what sign” is invisible or intentionally avoided, closes the theoretical framework of the paper (Foucault, 1987).

The relationship between social representations and memory in the urban landscape is particularly important here. It should be noted that identity and memory, in a political context, are a part of a dynamic and unstoppable process. As Martha De Alba writes:

Social representations of space allow to understand the meanings of places, according to the characteristics of the social identity of the actor (...). The relationship between social representations and practices should be seen as dialectic and changing over time. Our ideas support, generally, our actions, while we can enrich our thought system. In the case of territory, social practice makes reference to the uses that individuals and groups make of spaces and social the inner activities. (De Alba 2012)

This creates an opportunity to combine the visual anthropology and its interpretation made by representatives in the interviews. The purpose is to describe the urban map of Gori in the context of Stalin’s nostalgia.

Components Which Sign – Semiotics of Memory

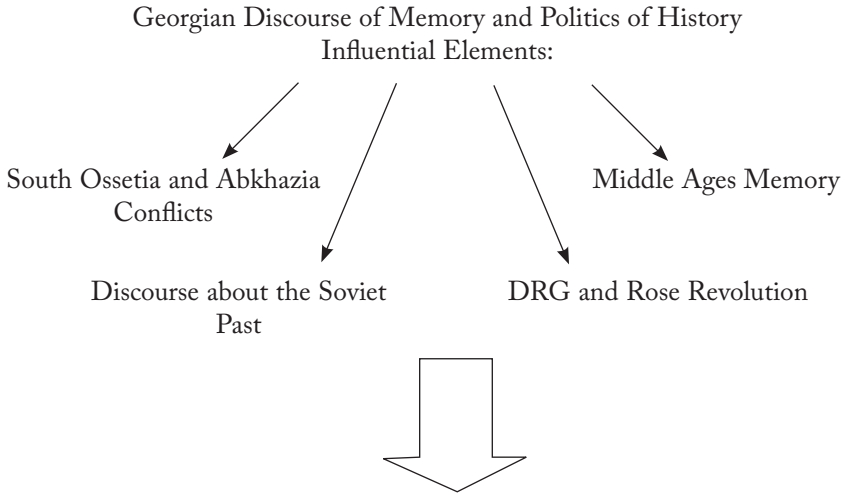
Before I turn to the specific case study of Gori, it is necessary to emphasize the reasons behind the choice of the objects and generally describe the core elements of the Georgian memory discourse.

The mnemonic struggle over the construct of a contemporary Georgian identity is visible all around the country. Even if suitable examples to describe the dissonance between the official politics of history and reality spread among the “carriers of the memory” can be found elsewhere, Gori seems to be a significant indicator for the whole project. As new quantitative research over Stalin’s nostalgia proves that Gori and Tbilisi (along with Ba-

tumi) – the places most linked with his biography, are not those where the strongest positive attitudes are kept (Gugushvili and Kabachnik 2015). However, at least two reasons exist which are helpful for presuming the importance of those places in a qualitative urban memory analysis. Gori is the town where Joseph Stalin was born, where the last personal museum of the dictator stands, where the last monument to Stalin was removed in 2010 and a place which is still attractive for tourists only because of the abovementioned elements (Civil.ge 2013).

Nowadays, four crucial elements construct the Georgian memory discourse. These elements comprise the collective and cultural memory.

During the Soviet rule of Georgia, according to the rule *divide et impera*, the first commemorations and statues started to appear which were glorifying the Middle Ages of the Georgian kingdoms and the period of the Georgian cultural and political Renaissance (XII-XIII c.) As Malkhaz Toria mentions, these politics of history were later transferred to the independent Georgian statehood as being the core element of memory formation. The second element is the reconstruction and re-writing of the memory of the short-lasting Democratic Republic of Georgia, (1918-1921) which started to be seriously reconsidered after the power shift brought about by the Rose Revolution in 2003, and also after the change in political climate following the war in August 2008 (Torია 2014, 316-331). The third element of the mnemonic map is strictly connected with the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. My own ongoing research into the influence of the so-called frozen conflicts on the memory processes and vice versa indicate that this is the crucial element in the memory formation of contemporary Georgian history². The last ambiguous element is the question relating to the memory approach of the Soviet past and of Joseph Stalin himself. The scheme below illustrates the four fields of Georgian memory, including the paths of representation creation and their existence in discourse:



1. New bipolar, one-sided approach to the Soviet past which rejects the positive elements on the level of politics of memory and history (after August War, 2008) (Torcia, 2014).

2. Official discourse is ambiguous. On the one hand there is the Stalin Museum, on the other, anti-Soviet and anti-Russian commemoration.

3. On the common anthropological level, the positive remembrance of the Soviet past is confronted with the official discourse.

4. Nostalgia is an obstacle for the identity project.

5. Today, In Gori, Stalin is not considered a “national” hero, but more of a “local” hero. The museum is used as a major touristic attraction, which increases the visibility of the city.

Knowing the scope of memory studies in Georgia, it is possible to begin the detailed analysis of cases significant to the urban identity in Gori in the context of Post-Socialism.

Case Study – Gori

Joseph Vissarionovich Djughashvili, the man later known as Stalin, was born in December 1878, in a small house of a cobbler called Bessarion Djughashvili (Beso) in the poor, provincial city of Gori in the southern borderlands of Russian Empire (Montefiore 2003, 25-27). From this point onward, the landscape of Gori changed considerably; however, the house of the future USSR leader’s father survives as a part of the sole remaining museum of

the bloody dictator. The monuments and commemorations of the “Red Tsar,” since his death in 1953, have all but fallen apart all around the world; even so, the six metre high statue was kept on the main square of Gori until 2010 when it was removed with a noticeable disagreement from the inhabitants of the town. What is the memory-shape of Joseph Stalin in his birthplace? Is there only a nostalgic recalling of the great leader born into a poor family, or are there some definitive connections with a post-socialist cultural memory of its own? Finally, what is the impact of this memory on the urban politics of history in Gori nowadays?



Monument of Joseph Stalin, Garden of the Museum. Stalin's Avenue, Gori.
© B. Krzysztań.



Stalin's Avenue, Gori. © B. Krzyszczan.

In 2010, Stalin's monument from the main square was removed during the night. Now it is lying in the basement of an old factory. The people want it back in the square.³

Gori is certainly a provincial entity, even in terms of a generally rustic or small-town Georgian development. Surprisingly, it seems to be one of the most popular tourist destinations. Despite the town being surrounded by breath-taking landscapes, with the High Caucasus visible on the horizon, the landscapes are not the primary attraction. Above all, it is the Museum of Joseph Stalin and the additional possibility of walking down the avenue named after him that brings the most visitors. From the perspective of a tourist, and in some way from the researcher's perspective, the journey to Gori is an opportunity to metaphorically travel back in time. A day spent in Stalin's birthplace continues to give the impression that Krushchev's secret speech at the XXth Congress of the C.P.S.U never took place, and the crimes against humanity committed during the 30 years of Stalin's reign in the USSR were never condemned. Knowing the historical reality, the museum of Stalin is mainly treated as a unique curiosity.

Despite the approach of the majority of foreign tourists, it is worth noting the attitude of the Gori inhabitants towards the memory of Stalin and socialism. It is also essential to bear in mind the approach to memory, which is undergoing a process of reconstruction following the Georgian-Russian War in August 2008. To describe this process, we need to include interviews, photographs and an ethnographic experiment analysis.

Below, fragments of the interviews express a general approach to the usage of memory, coupled with its influence on urban politics from the perspective of the authorities:

It doesn't matter whether Stalin was a tyrant or not. It doesn't matter who likes him and who does not. When I'm talking about him in the context of tourism development this really has no importance for me. If I would like to care about my city I have to think about incomes, do you understand? (...) That's crucial. And Stalin, **do you want it or not**, is like a brand. Whether he was good or bad it's a task for history to give an answer, **not for me and not for you**. I can only say that the biggest income for the city budget is coming from Stalin's Museum (...)⁴.

During the rule of the United National Movement and as a consequence of the Rose Revolution, actions appeared in the political discourse of Georgia, which purposefully intended to unequivocally condemn the Soviet past in the public space. Top-down policy left no chance to discuss the achievements of this period implementing the black-and-white discourse around the past (Jones 2014, XXV)⁵. In fact, the politics of history continued after the regime change in 2011/2012. However, the above-mentioned example clearly examined the ambiguous and diversified attitude of the Gori authorities. As we may observe from a linguistic level, the interviewee is far from making certain judgements. Several usages of sentences based on the structure "yes (...) or not" along with the assumption that neither the interviewee nor the interviewer can clearly decide how to treat Stalin. Stalin may be judged, but only by abstract "history" and not by particular human beings, which betrays a cautious respect towards him, through the eyes of interviewee⁶. Later on, when the interviewee was asked about the attitude of Gori citizens towards Stalin, he answered:

Old people respect Stalin without discussion. Soldiers participating in World War II are still alive; they are living in Gori as well. They think that he was a hero who defended the state from fascism. It is the

same as with young people. **It doesn't matter whether you like it or not**, the citizens respect him here, definitely. I understand as well – he was not an ordinary man. A splendid politician, but obviously a tyrant as well. If you're a politician you've got to listen to the voice of the inhabitants, **even if they think differently from me**. I will tell you one thing – 7,000 people signed the petition to restore Stalin's monument. They want to restore it in front of city hall. We told them that it's possible only on the terrain of the museum, to be like an exhibit⁷.

Using the same grammatical scheme based on the binary opposites, the interviewee emphasizes that his personal approach (individual memory) is not significant, because of the collective memory of the citizens. Through the recalling of the citizens' opinions, the interviewee is escaping from the personal viewpoint, and rather trying to locate it amid what for him is the average opinion of Gori citizens (he was great, but obviously I know he was a tyrant as well). Again, it is repeated that the decision is not 'ours'. A third, independent power has to decide rather than 'us'. Based on memory and local patriotism, abstract "Gorians" have to express their attitude towards the leader.

A similar repeated distinction between how Stalin should be treated as a former leader of the USSR and one of the biggest criminals in human history (what history is going to judge) and what he means to the local inhabitants is expressed in the second interview:

I will tell you one thing. He was a splendid man, really splendid. I don't want to talk about that now, but, going deeper, not a lot of people are remembered in history like he is. **Whether you like him or I like him has no importance, it doesn't change anything.** I don't think that it's easy to answer the question of **whether it's good or bad** for the city to use Stalin as kind of temptation for tourists. It's easy for citizens to express hard-line opinions. For me, as a representative of power, it's more problematic. I think that you cannot reject every element of the Stalin's past. We should find positive seeds. It's also not fair to call those people who respect him Stalinists⁸.

Here too, the discourse is based on dualities ("yes or no"). This interviewee is more specifically describing his own opinion about the dictator by emphasizing the importance of his "splendidness" through the repeated usage of the word. It is most likely that he is not defending the urban policy of memory, thus recalling the citizens, but rather he is advocating the citizens

themselves. Again, the interviewee states that “we” have no rights to evaluate the choices of this “splendid” man. Surprisingly, in the context of the city, this interviewee is not very sure that the use of Stalin’s legacy as a temptation for tourists is ethical and proper. Consequently, facing this necessary dual perspective (as an official and as an individual) he is trying to escape from a bipolar, black-and-white discourse to a more steady judgement.

Based solely on the interviews, anthropologists researching the Soviet memory may follow the artificial prediction that the use of memory about Stalin is only rational and has nothing in common with the emotionally positive attitude towards the dictator. Even though this pragmatic and economic perspective on Stalin is understandable, different layers of conclusions can be drawn when the ethnographic experiment is examined along with visual sources.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Stalin’s Museum at Stalin’s Avenue, Gori. © B. Krzysztan.

The four pictures are examples of exhibits from Stalin’s Museum. The idea to create the museum first came into being in 1937, on the eve of the

Great Purge and the period of the “cult of personality” in Soviet history. The initial memorial was created from the house of Stalin’s father. During the thaw that began in 1956, there was an initiative to re-arrange the space into a museum of socialism; however, the initiative was quickly forgotten. In 1957, the main exhibition building was opened. Over time, the museum has remained largely unchanged, still untouched, perhaps due to the fact that it is the most vital and one of its kind element of the urban landscape of Gori⁹. The photographs allow for the analysis of the space of the museum and the specific reconstruction of Georgian cultural and collective memory in contradiction to the official policy. A chronological display at the museum gathers exhibits linked with Stalin, which include personal belongings, commemorations, documents, propaganda pictures, and gifts, which he received (Figure 1 and 2). Those who are not familiar with historical facts may form an impression that they are at the museum dedicated to the great leader for his honour and remembrance. It is not difficult to notice that the exhibition avoids mention of the Holodomor, the Great Purge, the fatal errors and the victims of collectivization and the Soviet Gulags. As far as one can tell, the exhibition is based on Stalin’s personal story, and not strictly on his political decisions. This approach is understandable, however the glorious moments are distinctly underlined (e. g. figure 3 where his cabinet is visible). Therefore, one is forced to conclude that the narrative advanced by the museum is not exactly based on historical objectivity, but rather a proud, collective memory of the locals, which glorifies Joseph Stalin as the greatest son of Gori. This impression deepens, when after visiting the building the visitors are taken to see the humble house of Stalin’s parents (Figure 4). The message is clear: “he made great accomplishments having nothing at the beginning”. Thus, the usage of visual anthropology demonstrates that apart from a rational and economic usage of memory, as emphasized in interviews, other layers exist. The political representation concerning Stalin’s memory has a concrete shape, which might be described as being far from neutral.

Hence, after this contradictory experience, demonstrated through diversified anthropology it is necessary to add constructive elements, which might present a normative approach to the question of memory in urban policy of Gori. Asking for permission to conduct an authorized interview with museum officials, I had been rejected several times, receiving only a short note in which the official discourse of the museum had been repeated. Thus, I decided to conduct an anthropological experiment. Visiting the museum in separate time periods (August 2014 and January 2015) I examined the differences in discourse when the guided tour is delivered in foreign languages; first, in Russian, and then in English. The first guide (below G1) was a mid-

dle-aged woman, fluent in Russian. Crucially, it turned out that she was a local of Gori. Additionally, a significant influence on the discourse of the tour was provided by the fact that I was joined by a group of four Russian tourists from Saint Petersburg. The second guide (below G2) was a woman in her late 20s/early 30s. During the second visit, I was accompanied by two tourists from Poland. In both cases, the guides were aware of my nationality, but not of my profession and the nature of my visit. The scheme of both experiments was analogical. The guides began by talking about Stalin's youth (before his contributions to the revolutionary movement in the Russian Empire), chronologically touching on the next steps of his life and political career. At first, I intentionally asked neutral questions to avoid any evaluations or judgements (e.g. "what is that" "who gifted that to Stalin" etc.). G1 answered the questions with a calm voice, but with emotional self-confidence and with clear respect to Stalin's belongings (G1 talked about some of them as if they were relics). G2 was more neutral, patiently explaining the sources and exhibits. Overall, both guides behaved similarly. After I started asking more controversial questions, (e.g. "Why are you using propaganda pictures from which Trotsky is removed?" "Why doesn't this map represent the aggression of the Soviet Union toward Finland, Poland and the Baltic States?" "Why is the period of collectivization, the Great Hunger and the Great Purge not exhibited?" etc.) visible differences were noticed. G1 avoided answering my questions, and angrily attempted to "correct" my mistakes and lack of historical knowledge. In contrast, G2 patiently answered that she was aware of the doubts and comments of visitors, but that the policy of the museum must be adhered to. Even though she did not answer most of the controversial questions, she noted that at the end of the trip we would be shown a special chamber, which was constructed to commemorate Stalin's victims (broader description below). Then, in both cases, we stepped down into the basement. The chamber was created to condemn the abuses and crimes of the Stalinist period. In figure 5, seen below, part of this chamber is visible. The second part of it displays letters sent from the Gulag camps hung on an enormous red piece of material. When we entered the room with G1, she very briefly described the idea of this "additional" chamber, talking about the metaphorical character of the "letters" and "words" as well as pointing out the desk of an NKVD officer. G2 explained that this was the promised part of the museum in which the second face of Stalin's regime was portrayed. Slowly and unwearyingly, she told the story of the room itself, including information about the historic period, and recalling the number of victims identified by scholars. G1 did not respond to my question as to why this part was just an addition and not included as a main part of the exposition. G2 answered the same question

rationally, saying that it would require a total reconstruction of the museum. She added that museum workers are totally aware of the committed crimes and are trying to convey to tourists maximally objective data. Observation of G1, and the way she hurriedly pressed us to leave the chamber, created the impression that she might not be happy with this room of “condemnation’. G2 frequently underlined the necessity to represent an unbiased version of history, despite the cultural memory attached to it.



Figure 5. Basement chamber in Stalin's Museum, Stalin's Avenue, Gori. © B. Krzysztan.

Of course, this experiment cannot be fully representative of reality because of many limitations (individual and emotional approach, limited knowledge of the guides, the attitude to the job, which cannot be evaluated after one observation, etc.). However, combined with the previous discursive and visual examples, it gives some impression of the approach to memory and politics of history in Gori. Stalin's legacy for the city officials and citizens is still ambiguous. On the one hand, local pride and Soviet education (in the case of G1) lead to an approach, which glorifies Stalin's abilities as a politician, alongside the idealization of his childhood in Gori. On the other, a different education (the knowledge of English) and relative youth lead to distance and greater objectivity. In the case of G2, the Museum of Stalin and his legacy seem to remain a curiosity and a tourist attraction from which the town could benefit.

The clash of memories in Gori, has been under an even bigger strain from a newly reconstructed identity project, following the traumatic events of the August War in 2008. As a result of this event, differentiated indicators have produced attempts to influence the urban landscape and create official memory politics in Gori.

Since Georgian sovereignty still faces some tough issues, with the so-called "frozen" conflicts over the secessionist provinces of Abkhazia (Abkhazeti) and South Ossetia (Samachablo). The confusing participation of the Russian Federation in the destabilizing process has had a significant impact on the identity project and collective memory. Thus, in the case of Gori, there is a paradoxical new counter-memory, which attempts to reshape the identity and attractiveness of the town. The existence of a contrary discourse is a sign that the renewal process of cultural memory, confronted with the politics of history in Georgia, is still on-going.

Since the military conflict of 2008, the landscape of Gori and its surrounding areas have changed visibly. For the tens of thousands of IDP's (internal displaced persons), the government has created temporary housing, mainly located around Gori and next to the highway going to Tbilisi (IDMC Report, 2012). Also, Soviet architecture was destroyed after the Russian bombings in 2008, causing noticeable changes in the urban landscape. However, the greatest focus was placed on the new geographical mnemonics and the commemorations, which took place after the conflict.



Figure 6



Figure 7

War Commemoration, IDPs Village, Gori. © B. Krzysztan



Figure 8. Merab Mamardashvili's Peace Monument, Gori. © B. Krzysztan



Figure 9



Figure 10

August War 2008 Commemoration, Stalin's Museum, Gori, ©
B. Krzysztan.

The above photographs represent the counter-memory or politics of history as applied from the top. It is important to note that politically motivated changes were implemented both in the public space, by establishing new monuments, and also through commemorations (Figures 6 through 8). Close to the IDP area, the monument commemorating the victims of war and glorifying peace was established (Figure 8). The central portion of the monument depicts the face of Georgian philosopher, Merab Mamardashvili, and his quote: "Who has tasted freedom, will never refuse it". The long wall, which frames the monument, is an example of the new discourse in Gori, which aims to uncover new qualities in memory politics. Also, on a hill, in the middle of a newly built IDP neighbourhood, lies the personal memorial of Georgian-Russian war heroes. The description, written in Georgian, says: "a memorial for Giorgi and Gela Romelashvili, who died heroically in the Russian-Georgian War, in August, 2008. Eternal Memory". What is the sense in representing historical events here? Observing the historical discourse in Georgian politics after the Rose Revolution, gives an impression that the authorities try to cultivate a notion of continuity between the USSR and Russia. Gori, a city, which had been directly occupied by Russian troops, seems to be the best space, which could be used for this particular attempt to reconstruct an identity. Nevertheless, this reconstruction is difficult to achieve because of the aforementioned collective memory of Stalin. To fulfill their political goals, the central authorities are trying to rearrange urban space. To achieve this, mutual aspects of memory are used – individually linked with particular people and cultures, with usage of metaphors, which are easy to interpret in the right context (Mamardashvili's monument). Simultaneously, the past

cannot be fully rejected; this is due to its profitable character and the consequential need to keep it for economic development.

Accordingly, the new politics of memory has been implemented in Stalin's Museum as well. Following the war in 2008, the Georgian authorities informed the public that the museum of Stalin would be transformed into a museum of Russian occupation (Gazeta.ru 2008). However, this attempt failed, in 2012, when a new proposal, to change the Museum of Stalin into the Museum of Stalinism, appeared (Civil.ge 2012). As of March 2015, these plans are still in the initial stages of implementation. Nevertheless, in the main hall of the museum, one can find the following sentence: "this museum is a falsification of history". It was after the 2008 war, that a new chamber was established in the basement of the museum. From the first room in the basement the visitors enter a smaller room. The inventory of the chamber consists of dramatic photos taken during the bombings and the Russian occupation of Gori in 2008 (Figure 9). Fragments of destroyed buildings are also visible in figure 10. This approach is curiously represented in the story lines given by the guides; therefore, I will again turn to the anthropological experiment conducted in Stalin's Museum and describe the second part of the observation in the basement where the exhibit commemorating Stalin's victims is located, along with the gallery of photographs documenting the August War of 2008.

The comparison between the official visual discourse and the collective memory underlines the disparity between the two. At the beginning of the tour, G1 said: "In this room we have the photographs from the war in 2008, when Gori was occupied by Russian troops". Even though nothing was said in response, G1 quickly added that the room had not been constructed to spread anti-Russian propaganda, because of the fact that "all Georgians love Russia and Russians", but rather to commemorate the victims of a senseless war. It is probable that due to the nationality of my companions, G1 seemed a bit nervous, causing her to unintentionally search for an explanation for this part of museum. G2 described the exhibits with greater precision, and when prompted, she told us the war stories, from her personal memory. Her behaviour was more natural, which could be because she had presumed that, besides her, no one in the room had an emotional connection with the events of 2008. It is difficult to precisely state G1's approach to the new version of memory; however, on observation, it is possible to say that this part of the museum served, in this particular case, as the foundation for her strongest and most definitive, emotional, speech.

In light of the abovementioned examples, we can re-examine the core question: what is the role of these counter-memories in the urban identity of Gori?

Conclusion

Malkhaz Toria accurately proposed that, “in the context of serious challenges, state-sponsored memory projects can strengthen national and social cohesion. Today, Georgia’s new elites are destroying the “mental bridges” between the Soviet period and the new post-Shevardnadze revolutionary era” (Toria 2014, 330–331). In the particular case study of Gori, this memory project creates a new space, contradictory to that of the collective memory of the citizens, who treat Joseph Stalin not exactly as an icon of Soviet nostalgia, but rather as a local hero. This new, state-driven memory project also aims to re-shape the approach to the past. After the August War of 2008, the difference between the adjectives “Soviet” and “Russian” was rejected in order to present Georgians a politics of continuity. Nevertheless, considering the complexity of Stalin’s memory in Gori, together with the pragmatic and economic approaches to the museum, the creation of a new top-down political system proves challenging. The transformation of the popular collective and cultural memory in Gori, through a state of permanent conflict, will most probably last as long as it remains a significant indicator for urban policy and local identity. Anthropological research underlines that Gori exists in a duality of discourses – on the one hand, through a nostalgic, collective memory; on the other, through a hostile, state-driven policy of recreating the past, which for many Georgians is also an artificial and exaggerated process.

It could be perceived that in the case of Gori, the person of Joseph Stalin is used as a brand. In a situation where Gori itself has limited resources, paradoxically, the most famous citizen of the town has given the opportunity to boost its touristic potential. As the visual examples, and particularly the in-depth interviews, proved, the legacy of Stalin is not something, which might be called desirable, but another alternative simply does not exist. Hence, the pragmatic approach of the city council and authorities has led to a situation in which the discourse concerning the Soviet heritage in Gori is dual and in many cases contradictory. Even though the authorities underline their pragmatic character by using the person of Stalin and Stalin’s museum as a promotional tool, in order to escape from being provincial, a real local pride can be seen in regards to his person. This positive memory remains chiefly in the older generations of Gorians (one of the museum guides) and stands in contrast to the official state-driven urban memory reconstruction project implemented after 2008, whereby Gori authorities attempted to use Stalin only as a brand.

It seems that the example of Gori perfectly encompasses the Georgian ambiguous approach to memory about the past. The experiences following

the collapse of the USSR forced the authorities to hasten the reconstruction of Georgian identity, which was thought to have been helpful in strengthening Georgian independence. And yet, the example of Gori demonstrates ambiguity and a lack of will to cross-examine the Soviet past.

Notes

1. All the pictures used in the article were taken by the author. Locating the spots on the city map is fairly easy. Most of the places are located on the Stalin Avenue (e.g. Museum, local authorities building). Merab Mamardashvili Monument and IDP's housing are located in the suburbs on the road leading to the highway which joins Gori and Tbilisi.
2. The research is still on-going. During the fieldwork, in interviews, these presumptions about the importance of the conflicts for Georgian identity project are repeated frequently. Also, the initiatives of the government taken after 2008 (e.g. the creation of the Heroes Square monument in Tbilisi) prove that this important switch in the collective memory and politics of history has occurred.
3. Interview with Zaza, member of the *sakrebulo* (city council) of Gori. Zaza invited the author to visit the Gori municipality building and provided the opportunity to interview officials. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the last names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. All interviews with officials were conducted in Russian and in Gori on the 22nd of February, 2015. Translations made by the author.
4. Interview with Papuna, member of Gori's *sakrebulo* (city council). Authors' own translation from Russian.
5. Among others: the creation of the Soviet Occupation Museum as a part of the Georgian National Museum in 2006, or establishing new state holidays in 2010: 9th April – the anniversary of a bloody skirmish between the Soviet Army and peaceful protesters in Tbilisi in 1989; 25th February – Day of Soviet Occupation and 23rd August – The Day of the Memory of Victims of Totalitarian Regimes.
6. In the interviews, history is very often emphasized in a dialogical, Marxist manner.
7. Interview with Papuna, continuation.

8. Interview with Nutri, Gori official. Own translation from Russian.
9. Information about the history of the museum is based on the official brochures and website.

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