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Remembering Conflict: The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 in Georgian Museums

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Abstract

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 is an understudied topic within Memory Studies in Anglophone academic literature. However, considering the War's significant role in shaping Georgia's socio-political landscape and identity, the omission is puzzling. This thesis addresses this gap, by examining how the war is commemorated in museums.

Through the theoretical lenses of Memory Formats and Critical Museology, three case studies were analysed: the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti (both privately-funded), and the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori (state-funded). Using Thematic Analysis for interviews with museum staff and the Winterthur Model for artefact analysis, this research aimed to answer the following research question: How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why?

The findings suggest that the remembrance of the Russo-Georgian War revolves around three main themes: (1) Personalised Victimisation, driven by individual and social memories to pass on these experiences to future generations. (2) Historical Analogies, emphasising Georgia's ongoing struggle for sovereignty and reinforcing national identity through a collective national consciousness. (3) Russia as the Aggressor, highlighting the role of Russia as the villain, while silencing the roles of separatists and Georgia in the conflict to protect a positive self-image. Moreover, financial constraints and a lack of professional display policies also influence how the war is remembered, leading to somewhat fragmented and unnuanced exhibitions.

Notably, Personalised Victimisation is present in all museums, whereas Historical Analogies and Russia as the Aggressor are absent in the state-funded museum. The divergence reflects broader societal-political contrasts in Georgia, particularly since the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Georgian society supports Ukraine and condemns Russia, whereas the ruling Georgian Dream party has shifted from a policy of normalisation with Russia towards a more pro-Russian orientation. Grassroots initiatives to commemorate the war, contrasted with the Georgian Dream's minimal efforts in this area, shows a strong societal desire to remember the conflict. A desire which is not shared by the officials, indicating a lack of interest or willingness to engage in the politics of memory.

Keywords: Russo-Georgian War 2008, Memory Studies, Formats of Memory, Critical Museology, Museums in Georgia

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Introduction

"The main function of this museum is to break the myth that Russia has done anything good or will do anything good for anyone."¹

During Soviet times, the Russian nesting doll, or *matryoshka*, formed a unique symbol of national identity for the Soviet states. Each doll, fitting perfectly within the other, represents the Soviet ideal of individuals as integral parts of a larger society.² For Soviet Georgia, there was a degree of preservation of Georgian cultural elements, but the Soviet identity superseded all other individual identities. As a part of this Soviet identity formation, Russia was depicted as the "big brother", the "saviour", within the Soviet family; a narrative maintained in Soviet Georgia until the USSR's dissolution.³ This image fluctuated after Georgia became independent. The portrayal of Russia starting rotating, encompassing both "saviour" and "aggressor" views from the 1990s onwards. These images have been layered in the collective memory and activated according to the prevailing political reality.⁴

When Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement (UNM) rose to power following the Rose Revolution, winning the 2003 elections by a landslide, Georgia embarked on a pro-Western trajectory, aiming to return to Europe. In this context, Russia was no longer seen as a big brother but as an aggressor. Russia was increasingly perceived as the main adversary to Georgian independence, a sentiment solidified after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, also known as the August War.⁵ Under Saakashvili, the War's remembrance date was marked on August 7, indicating that the conflict began with movements of Russian troops rather than Tbilisi's attack on Tskhinvali on August 8. However, Saakashvili's strong anti-Russian sentiment did not resonate with a large part of the Georgian population. The tensions brought about by the uncompromising policies of the UNM, combined with the rise of a strong opposition led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, culminated in the decisive defeat of the UNM in the 2012 parliamentary elections.⁶

¹ Nino Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi, 10 February 2023.

² Helena Goscilo, 'Stacking National Identity: The Lucrative Legacy of the Matreshka', *Experiment* 25, no. 1 (30 September 2019): 227–43.

³ Nino Chikovani and Ketevan Kakitelashvili, 'Fluctuating Memory: Rotating Images of the "Big Brother" and "Aggressor"', *Culture*, no. 10 (1 September 2015): 131.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 130.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 135-136.

⁶ Christofer Berglund and Timothy Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation: From Ethnic Fragmentation to Civic Integration?', ed. Ghia Nodia, *25 Years of Independent Georgia. Achievements and Unfinished Projects*, 2016., 40.

According to David Darchiashvili, this regime change meant a "belated victory" for Vladimir Putin in the Russo-Georgian War.⁷

Ivanishvili blamed the UNM for numerous issues, including the August War, and promised the Georgian population a "balanced", "mild", and "diplomatic" approach towards Russia.⁸ The new administration pursued a policy of "normalisation" with Moscow, whilst prioritising Euro-Atlantic integration. The GD changed the 2008 commemoration date to August 8 instead of August 7, signalling that it began with Georgia's attack.

However, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (21 February 2022) has exposed a significant gap between the GD's "neutral" rhetoric towards Russia on the one hand, and the expressed anger toward Russia from the Georgian society on the other. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians took to the streets to support Ukraine and protest the Yanukovich-like government with its ambiguous neutral stance. With memories of the August War in their minds, society denounced Russian aggression and demanded the resignation of Georgia's Prime Minister.

The contrasting views of society and the authorities regarding how they perceive Russia and who is to blame for the 2008 War raises questions about how this War is remembered, not just during the prevailing political reality, but also how it is remembered individually, socially, and culturally.

Research Puzzle

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008, while important in Georgia's recent history, paradoxically remains an understudied topic within the field of Memory Studies in Anglophone academic literature. This is especially evident when compared to the bulk of literature regarding, (1) the War in the context of International Relations and, (2) Memory Studies regarding Georgia's Soviet past, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, significant questions arise regarding the relevance of the most cited works on the 2008 War within Memory Studies. As Table 1 illustrates, the top 5 titles are more closely related to the fields of International Relations, Security Studies, and News Framing.

However, considering the War's significant role in shaping the contemporary Georgian socio-political environment and identity, the omission is puzzling. Notably, in the late

⁷ David Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008: Clash of Ideologies and National Projects in the Era of Hybrid Warfare'. *Sōjateadlane*, no. 7 (2018): 30-35.

⁸ Nutsa Batiashvili, *The Bivocal Nation*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018., 139.

aftermath of the War, it even caused the fall of the Saakashvili administration and resulted in Ivanishvili's victory. The lack of academic discourse on how the 2008 War is commemorated, suggests a need for more scholarly research.

This thesis seeks to address the gap in Memory Studies related to the Russo-Georgian War. Given the broad scope of Memory Studies, this research focuses specifically on one mode of commemoration: museums. This research analyses three case studies: the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti, and the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori. Museums, as dynamic mediums of collective memory, offer a unique lens through which to examine the interplay of history and identity. The representation of the 2008 War in museums, despite its crucial role in narrative construction and public remembrance, has not been sufficiently explored. This is again highlighted in Table 1, which shows that none of the top results from the database search relate to the topic of museums and the 2008 War.

Choosing to focus on museums over other forms of commemoration, such as remembrance days, provides an interesting opportunity. Museums appear permanent, offering a more or less "fixed" point from which to witness the changes of memory and identity. Even though artefacts on display can change, exhibitions are overall lasting longer than annual commemorations, thus allowing for a more stable and comparative analytical framework. Furthermore, by researching multiple museums, this research aims to provide comparative analysis into how these recent events are remembered within Georgian museums — a task that remains unattempted.

Table 1. Number of search results for three keyword searches conducted in the JSTOR database.⁹

JSTOR			
Keywords	Number of Hits	Search Filters	Top 5 Titles (Sorted by Relevance)
Russo-Georgian War 2008 Memory Studies	280	- English - Between 2008 and 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Thawing of a Frozen Conflict: The Internal Security Dilemma and the 2004 Prelude to the Russo-Georgian War 2. Russia's View of Its Relations with Georgia after the 2012 Elections: Implications for Regional Stability 3. When History Matters: Baltic and Polish Reactions to the Russo-Georgian War 4. Anti-Russian and Anti-Soviet Subversion: The Caucasian-Japanese Nexus, 1904-1945 5. Muslim Communities of Georgia: Old Problems and New Challenges
Russo-Georgian War 2008 International Relations	806	- English - Between 2008 and 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Russo-Georgian Conflict 2. Conspiracy Narratives as a Mode of Engagement in International Politics: The Case of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War 3. The Russo-Georgian War and Beyond: towards a European Great Power Concert 4. A Game Theory Application of the Rational Actor Model to the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 5. The Bid That Tipped the Balance of Power: A Realist Approach for Intelligence Professionals in Understanding the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.
Russo-Georgian War 2008 Museum	181	- English - Between 2008 and 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abkhazia and Georgia: Time for a Reassessment 2. Red Orientalism: Mikhail Pavlovich and Marxist Oriental Studies in Early Soviet Russia 3. Review: Current Bibliography of the History of Science and Its Cultural Influences, 2008 4. Stalin saves the world – Stalin and the evolution of the Warrior and Saviour archetypes 5. Crossing Perspectives in "Manchukuo" Russian Eurasianism and Japanese Pan-Asianism
Soviet Past in Georgia Memory Studies	6513	- English - Between 1991 and 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To Whom Does History Belong? The Theatre of Memory in Post-Soviet Russia, Estonia and Georgia 2. Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70. 3. Void Pasts and Marginal Presents: On Nostalgia and Obsolete Futures in the Republic of Georgia. 4. Post-Soviet or Post-Colonial? The relations between Russia and Georgia after 1991 5. The Future of the Soviet Past Remains Unpredictable: The Resurrection of Stalinist Symbols Amidst the Exhumation of Mass Graves.

Research Questions

The study is guided by one main research question, as well as three sub-questions that will help answer the overall research objective:

How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why?

(1) Why were the museums established, what is their purpose?

⁹ The first three searches, "Russo-Georgian War 2008 Memory Studies", "Russo-Georgian War 2008 International Relations", and "Russo-Georgian War 2008 Museum", cover the period from 2008 to 2022, spanning the 2008 War to just before conducting fieldwork. The final search, "Soviet Past in Georgia Memory Studies," spans from the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 to the fieldwork of the study in 2022, contributing to its higher number of hits, in addition to the popularity of the topic.

(2) What considerations guide the selection and presentation of the artefacts in Georgian museums?

(3) To what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences?

Methodology and Structure

To answer these questions, this study is framed around the theoretical frameworks of Formats of Memory and Critical Museology. It employs a methodological approach that combines Thematic Analysis to analyse interviews conducted with museum staff members, and the Winterthur Model to analyse museum artefacts. Although the consulted literature for this study is based on Anglophone sources, it includes as many relevant contributions as possible from Georgian authors who have published in English.

Moreover, this study's main contribution to the academic literature – through frameworks of Memory Studies – is the establishment of museums in Georgia as memory machines that convey multifaceted themes in remembering the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.

This thesis is structured around six chapters: Chapter 1 consists of a historical contextual background of the developments that led up to the 2008 War, aiming to help understand the context in which the war broke out; Chapter 2 outlines the literature review of the theoretical frameworks, conceptualising main terms for this study; Chapter 3 integrates the theoretical frameworks by exploring the History of Memory in Georgia since independence, shedding light on empirical findings of Memory Studies in Georgia; Chapter 4 details the methodological framework, outlines the case selection and data collection processes, as well as the study's limitations; Chapter 5 presents the findings and answers the sub-questions; Chapter 6 discusses the findings in depth, analysing them through the theoretical frameworks, and answers the main research question. Lastly, the conclusion recaps the key findings and identifies potential areas for future research.

Chapter 1. Historical Overview of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian Conflicts

This chapter outlines the historical context necessary for understanding the roots and impact of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.¹⁰ Exploring these historical periods reveals the complex narratives and collective memory arising from the conflict, thus helping to understand museum exhibitions on the August War.

1.1 The First Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

To comprehend the complexities leading to the 2008 conflict, it is essential to start with the First Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), also known as the Democratic Republic Georgia (DRG). This period marked Georgia's initial attempt at modern statehood after centuries of foreign domination and highlights the national aspirations and geopolitical challenges shaping its modern history.

In the early twentieth century, the concept of territorial nationalism took root in the South Caucasus. Following the disintegration of the Russian Empire in 1917, a relatively unified Georgian nation existed, possessing a clear sense of its territory. Despite this sense of nationhood, Revaz Gachechiladze argues that "there was still considerable dispute as to what actually constituted Georgia's rightful territories among other groups such as the Abkhazians and South Ossetians."¹¹ This contention over territories and the idea of self-rule set the stage for the challenges faced by the DRG upon the proclamation of its independence in 1918.

As mentioned, the First Republic was confronted with the aspirations of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia to establish distinct ethnoterritorial entities. Abkhazia, driven by a need for security and lacking alternatives, ultimately agreed to unite with Georgia and was granted a measure of autonomy, albeit not the treaty-based federalism it had aspired to

¹⁰ Describing and analysing the (modern) history of Georgia in-depth is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, gaining more knowledge is encouraged. Suggested further readings include: David Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008: Clash of Ideologies and National Projects in the Era of Hybrid Warfare', *Sõjateadlane*, no. 7 (2018): 12–38.; Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009); Stephen F. Jones, *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, vol. 52 (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2010).

¹¹ Revaz Gachechiladze, 'Geopolitics and Foreign Powers in the Modern History of Georgia: Comparing 1918-21 and 1991-2010', in *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, vol. 52 (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 18.

achieve.¹² South Ossetia, however, resisted joining Menshevik Georgia, leading to three revolts backed by the Bolsheviks. By May 1920, South Ossetian leaders allied with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). South Ossetian forces captured Tskhinvali and contemplated advancing to Gori but halted. The DRG retaliated with a counterattack, leading to mass reprisals and devastation in South Ossetia. This period foreshadowed conflicts that would resurface in 2008.¹³

After the Red Army invasion of Georgia in 1921, the independent Georgian state ceased to exist, but during this brief period of independence, the groundwork was laid for "autonomous" governance in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Thus, the key legacy that Soviet rule created the institutions for modern statehood in these regions is incorrect; they actually originated during the DRG period.¹⁴ However, it was the Soviet Union that institutionalised and solidified ethnic identities through its territorial structure and its different treatment of citizens based on ethnic origin.¹⁵ The next section further details this long period of Soviet domination in Georgia.

1.2 Soviet Georgia (1921-1991)

The Soviet policies further shaped the political status of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Georgia, partly setting the stage for territorial disputes and ethnic tensions that persist today, as described in this part.

The arrival of the Red Army was seen as a liberation by many in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were "saviours", offering ethnoterritorial autonomy.¹⁶ Reflecting this sentiment, the USSR created several autonomous regions: The Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia (SSR Abkhazia), with quasi-confederal ties to Georgia until 1931, the Acharan (or Adjarian)

¹² Cory Welt, 'A Fateful Moment. Ethnic Autonomy and Revolutionary Violence in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-21)'. In *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, edited by Stephen F. Jones, London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014., 214-224.

¹³ Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. New York, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2010., 137.

¹⁴ Welt, 'A Fateful Moment', 205. Laurence Broers, 'Unpacking the Meta-Conflict. Claims to Sovereignty, Self-Determination and Territorial Integrity in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict', in *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2014), 264.

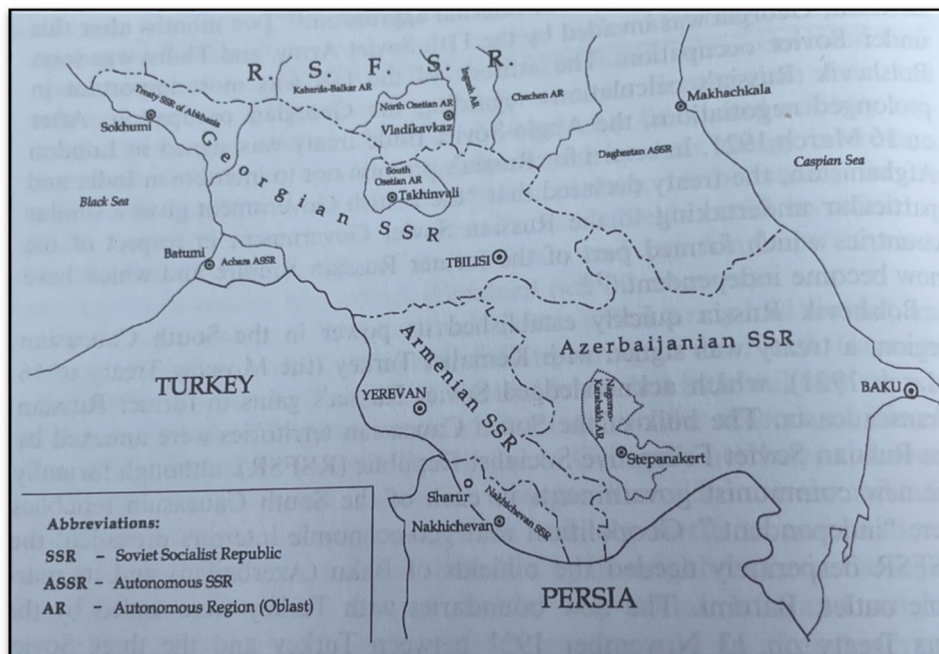
¹⁵ Ghia Nodia, 'The New Georgia. Politics, Economy and Society', in *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, ed. Galina M. Yemelianova Broers Laurence (London: Routledge, 2020), 175.

¹⁶ Welt, 'A Fateful Moment', 206.

Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Acharan ASSR), and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (AR or oblast), see Figure 1.1 for a visual representation of these republics.

In February 1931, Abkhazia's status was reduced to an Autonomous Republic (ASSR) within Georgia. The Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR), which included the Georgian SSR, was dissolved in 1936, leading to Georgia and other South Caucasian regions becoming Union Republics within the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Svante Cornell argues that these autonomous areas were "deliberately exploited by Moscow to undermine the Georgian state", a strategy with long-term repercussions. In the late 1980s they contributed to the destabilisation of the Georgian national movement. This eventually led to territorial disputes with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s, as described in the next section.¹⁸



Map 1.1 Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1923.¹⁹

1.3 Restoration of Independence (1990s)

In the South Caucasus, Soviet policies contributed to ongoing disputes and conflicts. This part examines how these dynamics evolved as Georgia moved away from Moscow, setting the stage for the August War.

¹⁷ Gachechiladze, 'Geopolitics and Foreign Powers in the Modern History of Georgia', 24.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 25.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 24.

As Georgia rejected Soviet rule, Abkhazians began to believe that the right to self-determination could only be reached by becoming a Union Republic.²⁰ Consequently, Abkhazia called to be separated from Soviet Georgia on March 18, 1989, and demanded the higher status of Union Republic. This sparked counterdemonstrations led by Georgian nationalists Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who condemned the Abkhaz separatism and accused "colonialist" Moscow of manipulating the situation. Unlike other regional movements, Georgia was strongly anti-Russian and anti-Soviet from the start; "for Georgians, the 'other' was Moscow itself".²¹ This anti-Russian/Soviet attitude was only intensified when, on the night of 8-9 April, the Soviet Army intervened in an anti-Soviet, pro-independence rally in Tbilisi, killing 19 people, almost all women. The April 9 Tragedy shocked the whole of the Soviet Union.²²

Following Abkhazia, South Ossetia also aspired to gain higher status and declared their intention to become an autonomous republic (ASSR) instead of an Oblast on November 16, 1989. However, Tbilisi dismissed the declaration.²³

About a year after the April Tragedy, tensions with South Ossetia escalated; on September 20, 1990, South Ossetians declared the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic. This led the Georgian parliament, led by Gamsakhurdia, to revoke South Ossetia's autonomy.²⁴ Following a declaration of state of emergency in the regions of Tskhinvali and Java, conflict broke out. Eventually this turned into the South Ossetia War, which lasted from January 1991 to June 1992 and is described in more detail later in this chapter.

Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union on the second anniversary of the April Tragedy, but fighting did not disappear. Gamsakhurdia became the first democratically elected president of Georgia. The text of the declaration made no mention of Abkhaz or Ossetians saying: "The territory of the sovereign Republic of Georgia is united and indivisible."²⁵

²⁰ Bruno Coppieters, 'The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict / Chapter 5 of Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 5, no. 1 (1 July 2004): 4.

²¹ de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 131.

²² Ibidem, 132.

²³ Ibidem, 139.

²⁴ Ibidem, 139.

²⁵ M. Volkhonsky, ed. *Konflikty v Abkhazii i Yuzhnoi Osetii: dokumenty 1989 – 2006 gg* [The Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Documents, 1989 – 2006] (Moscow: Russkaya Panorama, 2008), 50., cited in: de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 134.

1.4 War in South Ossetia (1991-1992)

The 1991 declaration of Georgian independence emphasised a unified Georgia. The dismissal of minority groups, together with Gamsakhurdia's divisive rhetoric, set the stage for the War in South Ossetia, as described in this section.

Thomas de Waal describes the South Ossetia conflict as "the darkest legacy of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, which could have been avoided."²⁶ South Ossetia, with its small, intermixed population with the Georgians, and only one link to North Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel (not built until 1985), had little reason for conflict. Despite the 1991-92 War, many Georgian communities remained in South Ossetia, unlike in Abkhazia. Gamsakhurdia's hostile rhetoric, labelling minorities as "*stumrebi*" (guests) and criticising mixed marriages as a threat to the Georgian nation, further exacerbated tensions.²⁷

When the fighting started in January 1991, the forces of South Ossetian separatists and Russia fought against the Georgian government forces and ethnic Georgian militias. The War in South Ossetia left around one thousand people dead, a heavy toll for a region with no more than one hundred thousand people. Moreover, this set the stage for hostilities that would resurface in 2008.²⁸

In early 1992, Gamsakhurdia was ousted and fighting in South Ossetia ended. Eduard Shevardnadze, ex-Soviet foreign minister, became Georgia's new leader. The Georgian and Russian leaders signed the Dagomys Agreement on June 24, 1992. This accord focused on halting hostilities and led to the deployment of a joint peacekeeping force composed of Russian, Ossetian, and Georgian troops in South Ossetia. The groundwork was laid for the so-called "frozen conflicts" of the South Caucasus, prioritising a ceasefire over substantive negotiations.²⁹

After the 1991-92 War, South Ossetia nearly disappeared as a political issue for Georgia, despite maintaining de facto separation. However, this situation shifted with Vladimir Putin's changing policies after he rose to power in the early 2000s, hereby also influencing the situation in Abkhazia.³⁰

²⁶ de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 135.

²⁷ Ibidem, 137-138.

²⁸ Ibidem, 140-141.

²⁹ Ibidem, 142-144. Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York, United States: New York University Press, 2007), 125.

³⁰ South Ossetia's border with Georgia remained open, allowing free travel. The breakaway state disappeared as a political issue mainly because it became hub for untaxed and smuggled goods, both uniting and sustaining the communities. Ludvig Chibirov, South Ossetia's first "president", engaged in talks with Shevardnadze in 1997 and

1.5 War in Abkhazia (1992-1993)

Abkhazia awaited a similar fate as South Ossetia, and as a larger and wealthier region, Georgia was determined not to let it go without a fight. This section briefly touches upon the Abkhaz War of the 1990s.

A boiling point was reached in 1989 after Abkhazia's request to secede from Soviet Georgia. War broke out in Abkhazia on August 14, 1992. The war lasted for fifteen months, with multiple pauses and ceasefires. The Abkhaz secured a victory in the war, but at a great cost, including the loss of about eight thousand lives and the devastation of Sukhumi.

The extent of Russia's involvement overshadows all discussions about the conflict, with Georgians claiming they fought Russia, not Abkhazia, while the Abkhaz maintained it was a conflict independent of Russia, with Russian aid to both sides. De Waal states that "the truth lies somewhere in between."³¹ This dichotomy reflected broader perceptions: Abkhazians believed that independence from Georgia was necessary for existence, while Georgians believed Moscow was exploiting Abkhazia to eliminate Georgian influence. Laurence Broers argues that the 1992-93 War reinforced these perspectives, with Georgian incursions affirming the Abkhazian narrative, and Russian support to Abkhazia validating Georgian fears.³²

In 1999, Abkhaz leadership held a referendum on independence, and elected Vladislav Ardzinba as de facto president. The subsequent rise of Putin's administration led to policies isolating Georgia, bolstering Abkhazia, and shifting the conflict's balance of power. A pattern similar to South Ossetia, where political changes and Putin's policies influenced the region's relationship with Georgia.³³ The emergence of the so-called "Colour Revolutions"³⁴ further alarmed Putin, as described in the next section.

1998, agreeing on much of an arrangement granting South Ossetia high autonomy within Georgia, though final discussions were postponed until the start of Chibirov's second term as president. Economic incentives to maintain the status quo were strong, considering "many senior officials on both sides were using South Ossetia's twilight status to make money." However, Chibirov lost the 2001 election at the same time as Vladimir Putin stepped into power. de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 145.

³¹ de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 159.

³² Broers, 'Unpacking the Meta-Conflict', 264.

³³ de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 164-165.

³⁴ The term "Colour revolution" refers to a series of political movements in the post-Soviet states, characterised by their nonviolent nature and significant involvement of civil activists and protesters. These movements often used a specific colour or flower as a symbol of unity and peaceful change. The main goals of these revolutions were to challenge leaders and regimes considered corrupt and authoritarian, and to promote democracy, transparency, and closer integration with the West. Key examples are Georgia's Rose Revolution (2003), Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004), Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution (2005).

1.6 Rose Revolution (2003)

Since Putin's rise to power, Russian pressure on Georgia has grown significantly. This section explores Georgia's Rose Revolution, emphasising how deteriorating relations with Russia led to the 2008 War.

The independence era brought widespread apathy, resignation, and cynicism about democratic reform across the South Caucasus. After a typically fraudulent parliamentary election in 2003, Georgia seemed on the same path. However, a brief, nonviolent series of mass protests, dubbed the "Rose Revolution" (22-23 November 2003), led to Shevardnadze's resignation. This opened the door to new elections on January 4, 2004, in which Rose Revolution leader Mikheil Saakashvili won by a landslide.³⁵

Saakashvili aimed to break with all previous regimes and a new revolutionary narrative emerged.³⁶ Where Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze legitimised their regimes as successors to the First Republic, the Rose Revolution stressed novelty and a break from the past.³⁷ The new pro-Western government adopted a powerful new paradigm in which the perception of Russia as a historical aggressor and an occupier stood at the core.³⁸ Moreover, this administration also proved democratic, focused on rebuilding the Georgian state, resolving secessionist conflicts, and pursuing NATO membership, all of which conflicted with the Kremlin's interests and further deteriorated relations with Russia.³⁹

Andrei Illarionov stresses that it was the rise of democracy in Georgia that provoked the movement of Russian troops across the Russian-Georgian border, a development that began before 2003 and continued thereafter.⁴⁰ This corresponds to Robert Person and Michael McFaul's view that Putin aimed to weaken Georgia's democratic foundations long before

³⁵ Charles H. Fairbanks, 'Georgia's Rose Revolution', *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 110.

³⁶ Malkhaz Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008: Historical Analogy as a Memory Project', in *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2014), 322.

³⁷ Stephen F. Jones, 'Introduction'. In *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, 52:1–14. 52: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014., 12.

³⁸ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 322.

³⁹ Svante E. Cornell, 'Georgia After the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy' (2007). Monographs, Books, and Publications: V, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/688>, Accessed May 2024.

⁴⁰ Andrei Illarionov, 'The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008', in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, by Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 49–84.

2003, eventually culminating in the invasion of August 2008, which is discussed in more detail in the next sub-chapter.⁴¹

1.7 Russo-Georgian War (2008)

The rise of Putin and Saakashvili redirected Moscow and Tbilisi's Caucasus strategies, leading to conflict. This section will further detail the events and implications of the Russo-Georgian War itself.

Tensions heightened well before the 2008 War, which can be attributed to Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz efforts. Saakashvili campaigned for a pro-Tbilisi government in South Ossetia to oppose the Moscow-backed government. Meanwhile, in 2006, Georgian forces established a pro-Georgian Abkhaz government in exile in Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge and renamed the area "Upper Abkhazia". These actions signalled a broader ambition of reunification.⁴²

A week before the 2008 War started, there were increasing number of skirmishes in around Tskhinvali between paramilitary groups from South Ossetia and Georgian forces. Both sides suffered numerous casualties. Increased military activity began in the evening of August 7 evening and resulted in a significant artillery bombardment of Tskhinvali by the Georgians in the early hours of August 8. Shortly after, a tank-led ground assault attacked the city centre.⁴³

However, the role of Russia must not be underestimated in the lead-up to the August War. David Darchiashvili argues that it was the stress of "hybrid warfare", happening since 2006, in combination with Russia's strong opposition to Georgia's pro-western aspirations that pushed Saakashvili to launch the attack on Tskhinvali.⁴⁴ Darchiashvili does not deny separatist sentiment in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but emphasises that it was fuelled by Russian military and economic assistance.⁴⁵ He states that:

⁴¹ Robert Person and Michael McFaul, 'What Putin Fears Most.', *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 2 (April 2012): 22.

⁴² Vicken Cheterian, 'The August 2008 War in Georgia: From Ethnic Conflict to Border Wars', *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 2 (June 2009): 158-159.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 159.

⁴⁴ Hybrid Warfare is generally understood as "a combination of actions, blurring the lines between War and peace, through the engagement of special and irregular military units, diplomatic, economic and informational measures, and support for radical anti-governmental forces operating within the borders of the targeted country, creating fertile ground for conventional military intervention under the guise of peace enforcement".

Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008', 12–38.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 18.

The overt clash between Georgian and Russian militaries, as a corollary of long-standing hybrid confrontation, is embedded not only in Russian imperial narrative, but also in Georgian, as well as in separatist Ossetian and Abkhaz projects of a local nation-building nature. These very narratives and deeds of local nationalisms, [...] obscured the reality on the ground for many international observers and gave Russia fertile ground for its hybrid warfare tactics and strategy.⁴⁶

On August 8, seven hours after Georgia launched its offensive on Tskhinvali, Russian forces entered through the Roki tunnel. Over the next two days, Russian tanks clashed with Georgian forces in and around the claimed capital of the breakaway state. On August 10, Russian forces pushed the Georgian troops out of Tskhinvali. Moreover, the Russian air force targeted Gori, Vaziani, Senaki, and Poti — cities situated on Georgian territory. When Russian and allied Abkhazian forces seized Kodori Gorge, a second front was opened. The Russian forces expanded their offensive, capturing Zugdidi, south of Abkhazia, and Gori, Stalin's birthplace, situated just 70 kilometres from Tbilisi.⁴⁷

Five days into the conflict, a ceasefire was brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, on August 12, 2008. Not long thereafter, the military operations ceased. By October 8, Russia had removed its forces from regions outside of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in response to the deployment of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM).⁴⁸

The question of who started the August 2008 War remains highly controversial. Russia claims the *casus belli* was a direct Georgian attack on Tskhinvali, to reclaim control over South Ossetia. According to the Russian narrative, Georgian forces invaded South Ossetia, targeting civilians, many of whom were Russian citizens and peacekeepers. Russia labelled the Georgian actions as "genocide", justifying its intervention as a humanitarian effort, drawing parallels to NATO's actions in Kosovo.⁴⁹ According to this narrative, the War started on August 8, with the attack on Tskhinvali.⁵⁰

Conversely, the Georgian government argues that the damage and civilian casualties were the result of a Russian attack on Georgian troops already stationed in Tskhinvali. They

⁴⁶ Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008', 15.

⁴⁷ Cheterian, 'The August 2008 War in Georgia', 159-160.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 160.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, 160-161. The "Kosovo precedent" refers to NATO's 1999 intervention in Yugoslavia to prevent ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Russia parallels this to its 2008 intervention in Georgia, claiming it was to protect South Ossetians from "genocide," thus legitimizing its actions as a humanitarian effort similar to NATO's. For more information, see Chapter 3 "The Kosovo Precedent" of Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁵⁰ For a more detailed discussion on the start-and commemoration date of the War, see Joshua Kucera, 'Twenty Years After Rose Revolution, Georgia's Political Parties Hate Each Other. But They Also Largely Agree.' Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 23 November 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/twenty-years-rose-revolution-georgia-political-parties/32695754.html>, Accessed May 2024.

claim their offensive was a response to intelligence about significant Russian troop movements, particularly reports of around 150 Russian military vehicles moving through the Roki Tunnel towards Kurta, just north of Tskhinvali. This escalation and perceived direct support for Ossetian forces by Russia, according to the Georgian narrative, necessitated their military intervention.⁵¹ According to this narrative, the War started on August 7, with movements of Russian troops.

While it is crucial to mention these differing narratives to understand the complexity of the conflict and the perspectives involved, delving deeply into each contested claim is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this work focuses on how these narratives are represented and remembered in Georgian museums.⁵²

1.8 Post-August War

This section briefly addresses the key consequences of the August War for Georgia. The political and ideological shifts of the post-2008 period up to the present are discussed in Chapter 3 in more detail.

The Georgian armed forces were unable to withstand the extensive Russian military invasion. This led to further territorial losses, the death of 850 people, and thousands of refugees.⁵³ Moreover, Russia recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In that sense, Georgia had lost the War.

The 2008 War initially fostered national unity, and Saakashvili stayed in power. However, by 2009, pressure on the Georgian government resumed. In the 2012 elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the Georgian Dream (GD), promised to ease Georgia's position in Russian-Western tensions and accused the Georgian government of starting the 2008 War. When GD won, it marked a significant shift, as, for Putin, this regime change meant a

⁵¹ Cheterian, 'The August 2008 War in Georgia', 160-161.

⁵² For more detailed discussions on these contested narratives, see the works of: Françoise Companjen, 'The War in South Ossetia, August 2008: Four Perspectives', in *Exploring the Caucasus in the 21st Century: Essays on Culture, History and Politics in a Dynamic Context*, ed. Françoise Companjen, Lia Versteegh, and László Marác (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 181–94. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009). Vicken Cheterian, 'The August 2008 War in Georgia: From Ethnic Conflict to Border Wars', *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 2 (June 2009): 158-159. Rick Fawn and Robert Nalbandov, 'The Difficulties of Knowing the Start of War in the Information Age: Russia, Georgia and the War over South Ossetia, August 2008', *European Security* 21, no. 1 (March 2012): 57–89. Council of the European Union, 'Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia.' 3 vols. Brussels: September 2009, www.ceiig.ch, Accessed June 2024.

⁵³ de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 216.

"belated victory".⁵⁴ The commemoration date of the August War was changed to August 8, instead of August 7, as previously marked by Saakashvili.

The Kremlin may have won the 2008 War, but Russia lost its status as a peacekeeper and was seen as an occupier by most international organisations and the EU. South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain isolated, relying on Russian support.

⁵⁴ Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008', 30-35.

Chapter 2. Literature Review & Conceptualisation

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for this thesis. To begin, the chapter will define the concept of Collective Memory. It will then expand the Collective Memory concept by examining the four Formats of Memory. The discussion will then turn to the functions of museums. Finally, the chapter will briefly introduce the concepts of Critical Museology and the Culture of Display.

2.1 Collective Memory

Memory Studies emerged as a distinct field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with scholars such as Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs, and others exploring the interplay between culture and memory. This field gained significant momentum in the 1980s and 90s, during the so-called "memory boom".⁵⁵ This spark was driven by the collapse of the Soviet Union, as former Soviet republics began to build their statehood and create new collective memories, stimulating research in memory studies. Contributions from scholars like Pierre Nora and Jan and Aleida Assmann* further expanded the field across academia, politics, media, and the arts.⁵⁶

Maurice Halbwachs is often described as the "founding father" of Memory Studies.⁵⁷ His seminal work, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), introduced the concept of "Collective Memory", which later became a cornerstone in the field of Memory Studies.

In short, Collective Memory can be defined as shared representations of the past. In his work, Halbwachs argues that memory is fundamentally social in character and not just an individual phenomenon, which is underscored by this statement:

[...] individual memory is nevertheless, a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively,

⁵⁵ Salome Dundua, Tamar Karaia, and Zviad Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 17, no. 2 (25 April 2017): 222–223. Aline Sierp, 'Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions', in *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung*, ed. Mathias Berek et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021), 2. Sarah Gensburger, 'Halbwachs' Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary "Memory Studies"?', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 4 (1 November 2016): 396.

* Both Aleida and Jan Assmann are esteemed scholars in the field of collective and cultural memory studies. The primary subject of this thesis is Aleida Assmann's work. For this reason, all references to "Assmann" are explicitly related to Aleida Assmann. Any references to Jan Assmann will use his full name.

⁵⁶ Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', 222–223. Sierp, 'Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions', 2. Gensburger, 'Halbwachs' Studies in Collective Memory', 396.

⁵⁷ Gensburger, 'Halbwachs' Studies in Collective Memory', 398.

leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over – to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come over us from the social milieu.⁵⁸

In other words, individual memories are a part of group memories, of the collective. Even though an event appears to be just about one person, it only becomes a memorable experience when that person reflects on it and connects it their social environment.

Halbwachs believes that Collective Memory cannot be understood without this social environment, in fact, the "social framework", is essential to Halbwachs' theoretical argument. Halbwachs believes that "the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society", obligating people "not just to reproduce in thought of previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them [...]", in order to give memories a "prestige" that they did not originally possess.⁵⁹ These collective memories are preserved and reproduced, and more importantly, Halbwachs argues that through this process, a "sense of our identity is perpetuated".⁶⁰

Despite Halbwachs being a main theoretical point of departure for many scholars, his emphasis on anti-individualism does not resonate with all. According to Wulf Kansteiner, in particular historians, often challenge the belief that a person's memory is only influenced by society, thereby marginalising the role of individuals in the development of Collective Memory.⁶¹ This debate is interesting for this thesis because understanding the balance between social influences and individual memory comes to the forefront when analysing the museum in Ergneti in particular. Lia Chlachidze, the owner, curator and only staff member of the museum experienced both the wars of the 1990s and the 2008 War herself. Therefore, it is often difficult to distinguish how her personal, individual memories of the War, as opposed to group memories, of the villagers for example, have shaped the museum's narrative. It is evident that she has her own experiences and recollections of certain events that occurred during the wars, such as the murder of her own husband. This thesis therefore acknowledges the importance of individual memory, recognising it as an essential complement to the social frameworks emphasised by Halbwachs.

⁵⁸ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory*. London; Chicago, Ill; University of Chicago Press, 1992., 53.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 51.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 47.

⁶¹ Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 181.

Another critique from scholars regarding Halbwachs' work is that it is "too vague".⁶² Especially since the memory boom, many scholars have therefore attempted to further develop Halbwachs' concept. In this thesis, it is agreed that Halbwachs could have clarified his concept. His notion of Collective Memory is intriguing, but it resembles more of an abstract idea, phrased in a rather philosophical manner without specific tools for analysing this Collective Memory.

In the research on how the Russo-Georgian War is remembered in Georgian museums, the concept of Collective Memory is relevant to understand how these institutions shape and present memories of the conflict. However, the idea of Collective Memory alone remains too vague for this research. Therefore, the next section outlines the work of Aleida Assmann, one of the scholars who has successfully further developed Halbwachs' concept. By addressing her work, this thesis aims to create a more nuanced and analytical framework for analysing Georgian museums.

2.2 Formats of Memory

One of the most famous works who further explored the concept of Collective Memory is from Aleida Assmann. She was one of the critics claiming that Halbwachs' concept is "too vague".⁶³ Therefore, she expanded and clarified the realm of memory by categorising it into four levels, which are described later in this chapter. Assmann's refined concept of memory forms a useful tool for this research because it allows for a nuanced and structured analysis of how the Russo-Georgian War is remembered in Georgian museums, highlighting the different dimensions of memory within these institutional narratives. This section sets out Assmann's work in more detail.

Assmann states that distinguishing between individual and Collective Memory is too simplistic and that they insufficiently represent "the complex amalgam of memories".⁶⁴ Moreover, she argues that these two types of memory interact with each other, instead of being isolated, highlighting that it can be challenging to differentiate where one type of

⁶² Aleida Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 211. Pim Den Boer, 'Loci Memoriae — Lieux de Mémoire', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin/Boston, Germany: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 20. Astril Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin/Boston, Germany: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 1. Rosa E. Belvedresi, 'The Vague and complex Character of Collective Memory: "On The Collective Memory Reader"', *Memory Studies* 7, no. 1 (2014): 108–12.

⁶³ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 211.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

memory ends and another begins – a point that is particularly applicable in Georgian museums established by people who also lived through the 2008 War. This raises the question: where do their personal memories come into play when shaping the museum collection? Attempting to expand and disentangle the broader spectrum of memory, Assmann distinguishes four levels, or "Formats of Memory": (1) individual memory, (2) social memory, (3) political memory, and (4) cultural memory.⁶⁵

The first format, individual memory, is necessary for human existence. Philosopher John Locke argued that memory is crucial for constructing the self, an identity, and for communicating with others.⁶⁶ This format is relevant for this thesis because the individual (episodic) memories of those who lived through the August War, play an important role in the curation of exhibits.⁶⁷ Their personal narratives and memories shape the way the War is presented and remembered in their museums.

The second format that Assmann distinguishes, is social memory. Social memories arise from social proximity, regular interactions, shared experiences, and common ways of life. While personal memories are limited by the lifespan of the individual, social memories are of intergenerational nature.⁶⁸ This idea of social memory was also recognised by Halbwachs, who asserted that Collective Memory cannot be fully understood without considering social frames.⁶⁹

According to Assmann, one form of social memory is generational memory; where members of a generation share a common framework of beliefs, values, and experiences shaped by significant historical events.⁷⁰ Understanding generational memory is important for this thesis, because, in Georgia, history – especially of the Soviet past – is remembered very differently across the pre-Rose Revolution and the post-Rose Revolution generation. Before 2003, the Soviet Union and Russia weren't demonised as much. However, this changed during the Saakashvili administration, which villainised Russia and viewed Moscow as the long occupier. This shift didn't just create different generational memories, it caused a societal drift

⁶⁵ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 211.

⁶⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Kay & Troutman, 1847), cited in: Aleida Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 212.

⁶⁷ Psychologists recognise several different memory systems in the brain: (1) procedural memory: skills and habits, (2) semantic memory: knowledge acquired through conscious learning, and (3) episodic memory: autobiographical experiences, which make us unique. Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 212. Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 50-51.

⁶⁸ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 213.

⁶⁹ Halbwachs and Coser, *On Collective Memory*.

⁷⁰ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 214.

between the older and younger generation, with the latter heavily distrusting Russia.⁷¹ Chapter 3 elaborates on this generational shift in more detail.

Assmann mentions that an important aspect of generational memory is generational change, occurring approximately every thirty years, bringing shifts in societal memory, norms, values, and cultural creativity. Public monuments and forms of commemoration often emerge at least fifteen or more years after significant (often traumatic) events, reflecting this temporal aspect.⁷² The fact that it takes time to commemorate traumatic events, is relevant for this thesis when looking at the timing of establishment of museums that address the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. The four museums (in Khashuri, Gori, Kaspi and Lanchkhuti) that include the 2008 War within broader exhibitions on oppression, were established in 2016, marking an eight-year gap between the event and its commemoration. Similarly, the only museum in Georgia primarily dedicated to the August War was founded a year later, in 2017 (in Ergneti). In contrast, two museums (in Gori and Kutaisi) that pre-dated the 2008 War, with a general focus on warfare in Georgia, incorporated exhibits on the 2008 War merely months after the conflict ended. The Stalin Museum introduced the 2008 War into a new exhibition on oppression just two years later, in 2010. These examples underscore that the commemoration of traumatic events often requires the passing of time. The few museums that quickly put the 2008 War on display, were those that already existed and had an established focus on War, meaning they had a unique position in responding to recent conflicts. Overall, by examining social memory, it can be understood how generational narratives and temporal dynamics of remembrance influence the way the Russo-Georgian War is remembered.

The third format, political memory, is a transgenerational process that involves selecting and excluding certain memories to construct a collective identity. This corresponds with Alon Confino's notion that the "politics of memory" were also "the politics of identity", at times.⁷³ Political memory is top-down, explicit, homogenous and institutionalised. According to Assmann, both political and cultural memory rely on external symbols and material representations, such as museums and libraries. This contrasts with individual and social memory, which are based on lived experiences and personal interactions.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Evgenia Jane Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters: Education Reforms and Memory Politics in the Republic of Georgia', *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 319.

⁷² Assmann exemplifies this by addressing that in both Dallas and Memphis, cities where John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were murdered, it took 30 years after their assassinations to establish museums that documented and commemorated the murder. Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 214.

⁷³ Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1393

⁷⁴ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 216. Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', 55.

Assmann provides one example of political memory: national memory. It only selects the historical memories "which strengthened a positive self-image and supported specific goals for the future. What did not fit into this heroic pattern was passed over and forgotten", meaning that victories are often remembered over defeats.⁷⁵ When defeats do get commemorated, this happens with great emotion and elaborate ceremonies, particularly by nations that build their identity on victimhood. However, moments of shame and guilt, stemming from traumatic experiences, are excluded to protect a positive self-image, states Assmann.⁷⁶

Understanding political memory is important for examining how the August War is remembered. The War represents a significant trauma for Georgia, as it resulted in the definitive loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This defeat impacted the nation, reinforcing feelings of victimhood and loss. It is important to understand how a political memory can balance victimhood and resilience, shaping Georgia's national memory and identity.

The last format, cultural memory, was developed by both Aleida and Jan Assmann. Cultural memory, or "*Kulturelles Gedächtnis*" in its original language, constitutes the final format of memory within Assmann's framework of Memory Formats.⁷⁷

Cultural memory, argues Assmann, differs from the other forms in that it is structured triadically, not just around remembering and forgetting but also around a third category that combines both. This third category represents the storage of extensive information in libraries, museums, and archives, exceeding the capacities of human memories. This makes it neither actively remembered nor entirely forgotten but in a "state of latency", as dubbed by Assmann.⁷⁸

Where political memory is homogeneous and emotionally charged, cultural memory, in contrast, is more complex and allows for diverse interpretations. It involves art and symbols that can be reassessed and reinterpreted continuously.⁷⁹ This complexity is relevant for this thesis, as the cultural memory of the August War is preserved and presented in Georgian museums; these museums store artefacts for the audience to be reassessed and reinterpreted.

⁷⁵ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 217.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, 217-218.

⁷⁷ Jan Ferdinand, 'Experience versus Recollection: Reinhart Koselleck and Aleida Assmann on Collective Memory', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 17, no. 3 (27 December 2023): 432.

⁷⁸ Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', 220.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 221.

2.3 Museum Functions in Contemporary Context

This section conceptualises the modern museum and its functions, focusing more on museum practices and less on theoretical discussions. This approach is adopted because the thesis examines how four museums engage in the act of remembering from a practical standpoint, making it less useful to delve into theoretical debates of museum studies.⁸⁰

Most scholars view the modernist museum as the representation of a nineteenth-century European model.⁸¹ During that time, nation-building led to the creation of public museums, which collected and organised artefacts to promote a Western-centric worldview. Therefore, scholars believe museums act as tools of liberal governance, helping to shape "imagined communities" and create informed citizens who can participate in democratic life.⁸² This corresponds with Lorena Rivera-Orraca's view, that museums helped generate discourses about history and nationalism. Therefore, Rivera-Orraca argues that "in this sense, museums are inscribed in and inscribers of collective and individual memory, identity, and practices".⁸³ In other words, museums act as a "meeting ground" where official and formal narratives of the past come together, as they are presented through exhibitions, and the individual or collective memories, that occur during or inspired by the visit.⁸⁴

The general perception of a museum in the twenty-first century has not changed much. Despite its conception not changing, museums are far from static; "they are about change and transformation"⁸⁵, they are "flexible entities capable of adapting to their surrounding context and social needs".⁸⁶ This adaptability became particularly evident in the 1990s when new

⁸⁰ For an overview of Museum Theory, see "Volume 1: Museum Theory" in Sharon Macdonald and Helen Rees Leahy, *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, First Book (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015).

⁸¹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 1995); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums & the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Florence, United States, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000); Lorena Rivera-Orraca, 'Are Museums Sites of Memory?' *The New School Psychology Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (10 May 2009): 32–37.; Conal McCarthy, 'From Histories of Museums to Museum History: Approaches to Historicising Colonial Museums in Aotearoa New Zealand', *Museum History Journal* 13, no. 1 (n.d.): 95–110.

⁸² Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums & the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 151. Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb, 'Museum Theory: An Expanded Field', in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), xxxvii. For more information on the concept of "imagined communities", see the work of Benedict R. O'G Anderson and American Council of Learned Societies. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition London; New York; Verso, 2006.

⁸³ Rivera-Orraca, 'Are Museums Sites of Memory?', 32.

⁸⁴ Gaynor Kavanagh, 'Making Histories, Making Memories', in *Making Histories in Museums*, (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006), 1.

⁸⁵ McCarthy, 'From Histories of Museums to Museum History', 96.

⁸⁶ Rivera-Orraca, 'Are Museums Sites of Memory?', 32. The "flexible nature of today's museum" is also noted in Edward P. Alexander, Mary Alexander, and Juilee Decker. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Blue Ridge Summit, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2017., 10.

nation-states emerged, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. These new nation-states turned to museums to help forge new national identities. Museums, such as the "Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights" in Lithuania, founded in 1992, were created to deal and break with their (oppressive) past. In that sense, museums can be described as "memory machines", where curators and directors craft narratives through their selection of exhibits, labels, and captions.⁸⁷

The specific functions of museums are described by Alexander et al.; they identify the primary role of museums as educational, articulating their functions around five additional actions, described below. However, they also note that museums are not obligated to fulfil every function.⁸⁸

(1) Collect: Most museums gather artefacts because they consider them to be significant and educational pieces of human civilisation deserving of careful study and with significant educational value. Collections are acquired through gifts and bequests from individuals and organisations, and through fieldwork and expeditions.⁸⁹

(2) Conserve: Ensures the long-term preservation of cultural artefacts. The overarching aim of all conservation efforts is to honour and preserve the original intent of the creator.⁹⁰

(3) Exhibit: An exhibit may be defined as "a showing or display of materials for the purpose of communication with an audience."⁹¹ One of the key components in the development of a museum exhibition is developing a storyline, which helps visitors understand certain master narratives or messages.⁹² Moreover, this storyline is often referred to as the "curatorial voice" or tone of the exhibition. Traditionally, this voice conveyed a single authoritative perspective. However, the rise of democratisation in museums and culture, the availability of multiple platforms for narrative content (such as apps), technologies, and the widespread use of social media have all challenged this singular authoritative voice in the twenty-first century.⁹³

(4) Interpret and Engage: Interpretation is understood as how museums communicate their messages to the public, encompassing both museum interpretation and education.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Katarzyna Jarosz, 'National Narratives of "Occupation" in Historical Museums of the Post-Soviet Landscape', in *Visual Histories of Occupation: A Transcultural Dialogue*, by Jeremy E. Taylor (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 234.

⁸⁸ Alexander, Alexander, and Decker, *Museums in Motion*, 193, 196.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 204-205.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 229.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 255.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 261-262.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 270.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 281. It is important to note the interaction between the visitor and the curator in the process of interpretation. As Kavanagh rightly states: "What happens in museums is far more than the cold meeting of the

Engagement refers to the methods by which museum professionals deepen their understanding of and responsiveness to audience needs, for example, through public programmes, tours, and other interactive initiatives.⁹⁵

(5) Serve and Act: By the late twentieth century, there was a shift from the traditional nineteenth-century museum, which often emphasised objects and specimens and often forbidden to the broader public, towards diverse educational and interpretative programmes.⁹⁶ Initiatives sprung up to advocate for embracing inclusive language and methods because they benefit both the institutions and the communities they engage.⁹⁷ Essentially, museums must face cultural, political, and economic challenges but also have new opportunities to serve society.⁹⁸

By keeping these roles in mind, the thesis can assess how each museum in the case study collects, conserves, exhibits, interprets, and engages with its audience. This framework will help in understanding how the August War is remembered.

While these clear-cut functions form a useful tool for understanding museums, there is a gap to address. As stated, Alexander et al. note that museums have evolved significantly, particularly by the late twentieth century, focusing more on diverse educational programmes and inclusivity, challenging the singular authoritative voice, which underscores the museums' transformative character. However, they do not explain what caused this shift, and understanding this is particularly relevant to this thesis. Therefore, this change is explained in the following section.

2.4 Critical Museology

The shift in museums towards a more inclusive character, is known as Critical Museology or New Museology, and gained momentum post-1989. Critical Museology is influenced by

minds of the visitors with the curator's carefully constructed displays [...]. This encounter has to be viewed in a totally different way. Both curators and the visitors make meanings; neither can put to one side who, when and why they are and neither can be or become a neutral, pure or homogenous unit." Kavanagh, 'Making Histories, Making Memories', 2.

⁹⁵ Alexander, Alexander, and Decker, *Museums in Motion*, 286.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 309.

⁹⁷ Alexander et al. highlight several initiatives, such as Margaret Middleton's Family Inclusive Language Chart (2014), which helps museum professionals use inclusive language for modern families. Additionally, the LGBTQ Professional Network of the American Alliance of Museums created the LGBTQ Welcoming Guidelines (2016) to ensure sensitivity and inclusion for LGBTQ individuals. For all initiatives, see: Alexander, Alexander, and Decker, *Museums in Motion*, 322.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, 320.

postcolonial theory, cultural theory and the history wars that (re)emerged during the 1960s, when there was a massive wave of decolonisation. At the core, these theories engage in challenging dominant discourses and advocate for more inclusive narratives. When the empires of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union collapsed, the world was perceived as being at "the end of history", and there was a growing awareness to deal with injustices of the past.⁹⁹

This is when Critical Museology emerged; because of a concern about how museums were embedded in power structures that supported dominant interests. Driven by equity and human rights, New Museology critically examines how museums, traditionally tied to colonialism, represent indigenous and minority groups, to advocate for change. It has also been used to create museums that reflect diverse beliefs and experiences, challenging outdated anthropological perspectives and supporting multiculturalism.¹⁰⁰

Within Critical Museology, the "Culture of Display" plays an important role. This understudied concept, developed by Raymond Williams in 1984, can be defined as "the use of culture and the arts in celebration, embellishment and strengthening of the economic and political power of the state."¹⁰¹ Williams argues that the state "is not only the central organ of power, but of display".¹⁰² Displaying power is as vital as important as maintaining it. Through a critical examination of the Culture of Display within the framework of Critical Museology, it becomes clear how specific forms of representation impact the distribution of power.

Conal McCarthy zooms in on the use of objects in museums as part of this Culture of Display. He argues that "The Culture of Display makes things visible to viewers, by putting objects into a context in which they are interpreted by the people who look at them."¹⁰³ In other words, McCarthy is emphasising that the way objects are displayed in museums plays a crucial role in how they are perceived and understood by the audience. Furthermore, while modern exhibitions appear natural due to their familiar presentation style, according to McCarthy, historical exhibitions reveal the ongoing artificiality of displays, highlighting how our ancestors' perspectives and exhibition methods differed significantly.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ In short, Francis Fukuyama's notion of "the end of history" is that, following the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War, the ideological Wars are over. Therefore, liberal democracy has won. Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18.

¹⁰⁰ Message and Witcomb, 'Museum Theory', xxxvii.

¹⁰¹ Definition derived from Raymond Williams, cited in: Kristina Karvelyte, 'Culture as Display Revisited', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (2021): 141.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, 143.

¹⁰³ Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display*. English. Oxford: Berg, 2007., 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 1.

McCarthy examines cultures of display in the context of Māori exhibitions, showing how New Zealanders presented themselves and how the meaning of Māori artefacts in museums has evolved over time. He explores how exhibits are influenced by the intertwined dynamics of colonisation, modernity, and nationhood.¹⁰⁵ McCarthy argues that changes in Māori display culture in the late twentieth century should be viewed not as inauthentic but as creative responses to social and political pressures in settler colonies. This narrative of Māori resistance, participation, and eventual mastery of the display culture exemplifies the "indigenisation of the museum", a process whereby indigenous peoples take control over the representation of their cultures and histories in museums.¹⁰⁶

Why are the frameworks of Critical Museology and cultures of display relevant for post-communist Georgia, particularly in examining how the Russo-Georgian War is remembered in Georgian museums? Despite the apparent dissimilarity between Georgia and the Māori of New Zealand, there exists a compelling parallel. Like Georgia, which endured colonial domination under Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union, many former colonies experience similar developments after independence.¹⁰⁷ Georgia's journey towards a modern nation-state post-1990s mirrors these experiences. Thus, it is crucial to employ postcolonial thought, such as Critical Museology and cultures of display to analyse how the Russo-Georgian War is commemorated. These frameworks help unpack the power dynamics embedded in museum representations, shedding light on whose narratives are prioritised and how historical events are contextualised to reflect the nation's struggle and identity.

Overall, this chapter has established a comprehensive theoretical framework to analyse how the Russo-Georgian War is remembered in Georgian museums. By using various lenses—Collective Memory, Formats of Memory, and Critical Museology—it becomes visible that museums serve multiple purposes beyond the practical roles of collecting and conserving.

¹⁰⁵ McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, 12. For a discussion on the concept of "indigenization of the museum", see: Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ This thesis views former Soviet Republics as colonies. For discussions on this topic, see the following articles: David Chioni Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *PMLA : Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 116, no. 1 (2001): 111–283.; Epp Annus, *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands*. Vol. 112. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY; Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.; Liviu Andreescu. 'Are We All Postcolonialists Now? Postcolonialism and Postcommunism in Central and Eastern Europe'. In *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps*, edited by Monica Bottez and Maria-Sabina Draga, Bucharest: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, 2011, 57–74.

They are dynamic, flexible institutions that continuously navigate their past which, in Georgia, takes place within in a post-communist, post-colonial and post-conflict context.

The integration of different layers of memory — collective, individual, social, political, and cultural — within museums highlights their complexity. A notable limitation with these concepts must therefore be recognised; it is hard to distinguish where one type of memory begins and another ends. Nevertheless, by acknowledging these memories can overlap, it becomes clear that artefacts can have different purposes. They are on display to represent more than one memory and perhaps to convey multiple narratives. This perspective helps in analysing the artefacts in the museum, as it underscores the importance of looking at them through various lenses.

Chapter 3. The History of Memory in Georgia

This chapter reviews the academic literature on state-led nation-building projects in Georgia since independence. In doing so, this chapter aims to provide an overview of the politics of memory in Georgia, shedding light on how Georgia remembers its past from a top-down perspective and, in this context, views the role of Russia. This is relevant for this thesis because understanding the politics of memory helps to contextualise the narratives found in Georgian museums regarding the Russo-Georgian War. Additionally, examining political memory provides insights into individual and social memory, since societal disagreements with the ruling political memory come to the forefront.

When the USSR collapsed, Georgia became "one of many belated nations", which raised important questions about the nation's future trajectory.¹⁰⁸ Recognising the threat of being an "incomplete nation" to political and economic stability, Georgian leaders turned to collective memory as a unifying force.¹⁰⁹ This revisiting of the past underwent four phases in Georgia since independence, as identified by Natalie Sabanadze.¹¹⁰ According to Sabanadze, these phases align with the tenure of different political parties, which are discussed in this chapter.

Furthermore, the evolving image of Russia plays an important role in Georgia's nation-building narrative. Nino Chikovani and Ketevan Kakitelashvili analyse this "rotating image" of Russia, which will be placed into the phases of Sabanadze. Before the collapse of the USSR, the image of Russia was that of a "big brother", a "saviour". However, when Georgia became independent, the image of Russia started rotating. Chikovani and Kakitelashvili argue that the image of Russia encompasses both "saviour" and "aggressor" views. These images have been layered in the collective memory and activated according to the prevailing political reality, which is outlined in this chapter.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ghia Nodia, 'Components of the Georgian National Idea: An Outline', *Identity Studies*, no. 1 (2009): 86.

¹⁰⁹ Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters', 320-324.

¹¹⁰ Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Georgian Nationalism, Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country*, CEUP Collection (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 67-114. Natalie Sabanadze, 'EU-Georgia Relations: A Local Show of the Global Theater'. Carnegie Europe, 16 November 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/11/eu-georgia-relations-a-local-show-of-the-global-theater?lang=en¢er=middle-east>, Accessed June 2024.

¹¹¹ Chikovani and Kakitelashvili, 'Fluctuating Memory', 130.

3.1 First Phase: Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992)

For Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the roots of modern independent Georgia lay with the First Republic. Gamsakhurdia's nationalism glorified the Democratic Republic Georgia (DRG), framing modern independence as its *restoration*.¹¹² This narrative provided a foundation for the new government.¹¹³ However, it is important to acknowledge that Georgian nation-building already started during the mid-nineteenth century. There is a path dependency from pre-Soviet and Stalinist nationality policies that influenced later nation-building efforts. The focus of this thesis, however, is on post-Soviet nation-building, driven by the state.¹¹⁴

The first phase of state driven nation-building, after the collapse of the USSR, was driven by Gamsakhurdia's slogan "Georgia for the Georgians".¹¹⁵ He attributed Georgian national identity to speaking the Georgian language, devotion to the Orthodox Church, and having Georgian nationality. Many scholars agree that under Gamsakhurdia, Georgian nationalism adopted a primordial, ethno-nationalist, ethno-cultural approach.¹¹⁶

While the First Republic provided as a foundational narrative, the focus on history was largely sidelined in the first years after independence. Georgia faced with two wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, economic collapse, and other crises. It is widely acknowledged that Georgia's efforts to address its past were both limited and delayed.¹¹⁷ Memory politics under Gamsakhurdia were sporadic and intuitive rather than deliberate and systematic. As Wojciech Górecki importantly points out, the 1990s also saw a lack of funding for such initiatives, with central authorities prioritising the stabilisation of the security situation.¹¹⁸ Consequently, a (continuous) politics of memory did not take shape under Gamsakhurdia.

¹¹² Katie Sartania, 'Struggle and Sacrifice: Narratives of Georgia's Modern History'. Carnegie Europe, 27 April 2021, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/04/27/struggle-and-sacrifice-narratives-of-georgia-s-modern-history-pub-84391>, Accessed November 2023.

¹¹³ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 318.

¹¹⁴ For further reading earlier phases of nation-building, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁵ Stephen F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*. London, United Kingdom: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2012., 216.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem. Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters', 324. Tornike Metreveli, 'An Undisclosed Story of Roses: Church, State, and Nation in Contemporary Georgia', *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (September 2016): 694. Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 15.

¹¹⁷ Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters', 324. Wojciech Górecki, 'Politics of Memory in Independent Georgia. Selected Aspects', *Institute of National Remembrance Review* 1 (2019): 285. Tamar Karaia, 'Memory Strategies in Contemporary Georgia', *Central European Political Studies*, no. 4 (2017): 5. Nino Chikovani, 'The Mtatsminda Pantheon: A Memory Site and Symbol of Identity', *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (26 October 2021): 241.

¹¹⁸ Górecki, 'Politics of Memory in Independent Georgia', 294-295.

Regarding the view of Russia, Chikovani and Kakitelashvili note that there was "no anti-Russian mode in the rhetoric of the first president of Georgia."¹¹⁹ While there were clear anti-Soviet sentiments, evidenced by the demolition of Lenin's monument in 1991 and the removal of statues of Communist Party leaders, the renaming of streets, that did not affect those named after prominent Russian figures like Pushkin, Gogol, and Gagarin. Chikovani and Kakitelashvili argue that this reflects how, during the final years of the Soviet Union and the early post-Soviet period, the image of Russia was not clearly defined, with the primary focus being on overcoming the legacy of the Soviet past.¹²⁰

3.2 Second Phase: Shevardnadze (1992-2003)

The second phase of post-Soviet nation-building by the state occurred during Eduard Shevardnadze's administration. To break away from the "times of troubles", Shevardnadze aimed to avoid unrest by adopting civic nationalism, or at least stated to do so.¹²¹ Despite efforts to include minorities in the national narrative, the official histories continued to depict Georgians as tolerant and hospitable, from which minorities "benefitted".¹²² The representation of independent Georgia as the legitimate successor to the first republic was maintained. Despite Shevardnadze's rhetoric about making Georgia more inclusive, the focus stayed with the national history that corresponded more with Zviadist sentiment.¹²³

The official narrative regarding Russia during Shevardnadze's era reflected similar contradictions. According to Chikovani and Kakitelashvili, the 1990s saw the Soviet Union's image merge with Russia's, viewed both as a supportive ally and an oppressive empire. Shevardnadze frequently spoke of "two Russia's": one progressive and democratic, the other authoritarian and reactionary.¹²⁴ This corresponds with Górecki's notion that the ambiguous perception of Russian annexation reflects Georgians' complex attitude towards Russia. Georgians harbour a deep fear of Russian neo-imperialism while simultaneously feeling a certain sympathy for Russians as a "fraternal" nation, partly due to their shared Orthodox Christian culture.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Chikovani and Kakitelashvili, 'Fluctuating Memory', 132.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 132-133.

¹²¹ Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 24. Jones, *Georgia*, 216.

¹²² Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 26.

¹²³ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008', 319. Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters', 324.

¹²⁴ Chikovani and Kakitelashvili, 'Fluctuating Memory', 133-134.

¹²⁵ Górecki, 'Politics of Memory in Independent Georgia. Selected Aspects', 301.

3.3 Third Phase: Saakashvili and Early Georgian Dream (2003-2020)

Phase 3.1: Saakashvili 2003-2008

While it can be argued that Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze did not break with the Soviet past, Mikheil Saakashvili took significant steps to do so. The third state-driven nation-building narrative persisted from 2003 to 2020 with minimal changes, which is set out in this chapter. Consequently, the choice was made to divide Sabanadze's third phase into three sub-phases: 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

In this third phase of nation-building, Saakashvili aimed to distance Georgia from its Soviet legacy. The United National Movement (UNM) moved away from ethnic nationalism, promoting a more "civic" nationalism, as argued by Christofer Berglund and Timothy Blauvelt.¹²⁶ Stephen Jones, however, points out that Saakashvili's approach combined civic nationalism with particularistic nationalism and civic patriotism, all framed within economic modernisation and state-building policies.¹²⁷ Similarly, Tornike Metreveli suggests conceptualising Saakashvili's state-driven nationalism as "hybrid nationalism" as opposed to civic or ethno-cultural.¹²⁸ Despite these debates, it is evident that Saakashvili significantly departed from ethnic nationalism compared to his predecessors.

The new Georgian identity under Saakashvili focused on positioning Georgia as a European nation that would have shared Western Europe's trajectory if not for persistent Russian interference. In Saakashvili's words: "We are Europeans and this is both our choice and our fate and I am sure that we will succeed and reintegrate a joint family that Georgia should never have been separated from."¹²⁹ The Rose Revolution symbolised this rebirth, marking a return to Europe.

Georgia's rotating image of Russia moved away from "big brother" or "saviour" towards "aggressor" and "oppressor". After 2003, Russia was increasingly perceived as the main adversary to Georgian independence, a sentiment solidified after the August War.¹³⁰ Saakashvili's narrative positioned the Soviet past as the "antithesis" of Georgian identity, depicting the USSR as entirely alien to Georgia, as if it had never been a part of it.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 32.

¹²⁷ Jones, *Georgia*, 216.

¹²⁸ Metreveli, 'An Undisclosed Story of Roses', 694.

¹²⁹ President.gov.ge. (2011a) The President of Georgia and the President of the European Parliament Held Joint Press conference, President.gov.ge, 19 May. Online www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/News?6436, cited in: Fabio de Leonardis, 'Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia', in *Nation-Building and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space: New Tools and Approaches*, ed. Rico Isaacs and Abel Polese, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2016), 27.

¹³⁰ Chikovani and Kakitelashvili, 'Fluctuating Memory', 135-136.

¹³¹ de Leonardis, 'Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia', 28.

According to Saakashvili, Georgia's post-Soviet challenges were all caused due to its Soviet legacy, equating the USSR with Tsarist Russia and the Russian Federation to explain the origins of conflicts with Moscow. Thus, Georgia defined itself in opposition to the USSR/Russia, associating itself with positive values and viewing Russia as the embodiment of negative ones.¹³² This binary opposition was not new; it was already introduced during Soviet times, although with different characteristics (socialist versus nationalist). Essentially, Georgia defines itself again by contrasting it with Russia.

The shift in narrative under Saakashvili is evident in the changing politics of memory, marked by symbolic actions such as altering the Soviet-inherited time zone and replacing the national anthem, coat of arms, and flag, which had their origins in the DRG. Additionally, Saakashvili introduced new symbols, such as the statue of St. George on Freedom Square in Tbilisi.¹³³ Malkhaz Toria argues that "this new infrastructure of collective memory instructs both Georgian citizens and foreign visitors how to distinguish the occupied from the occupier, victims from perpetrators, and collaborators from powerless bystanders."¹³⁴ Although there was a conscious attempt to create politics of memory, Górecki notes that the necessary specialised institutions to drive a top-down vision of the past were absent. Therefore, Górecki concludes, the UNM did not yet conduct a policy of politics of memory.¹³⁵

The new western-oriented government of Georgia also undertook educational reforms aimed at modernising the system and eliminating the remnants of the Soviet and post-Soviet structures.¹³⁶ This is exemplified by the new law on education (2005) and national curriculum (2008-2009).¹³⁷ Moreover, history textbooks had to deliver the official narrative to students from then on. Oliver Reisner notes that the third generation of textbooks, closely linked to the third phase of the state's nation-building, under the UNM, "reflects serious changes in Georgia's educational policy and approach to teaching and learning history."¹³⁸ They aim to be more reflective, multi-perspective understanding of national history. However, as Reisner notes, these textbooks still lack representations of minorities and majority-minority relations

¹³² de Leonardis, 'Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia', 28-29.

¹³³ Ibidem, 27.; Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', 234-235.; Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 32. Jones, *Georgia*, 226. Sartania, 'Struggle and Sacrifice'.

¹³⁴ Stephen F. Jones and Malkhaz Toria, 'Introduction: Rethinking Memory Sites and Symbolic Realms of Georgian National Identity', *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (26 October 2021): 213

¹³⁵ Górecki, 'Politics of Memory in Independent Georgia', 283-284.

¹³⁶ Batiashvili, *The Bivocal Nation*, 115-116.

¹³⁷ Jones and Toria, 'Introduction', 213.

¹³⁸ Oliver Reisner, 'Interpreting the Past – From Political Manipulation to Critical Analysis?', 3-4, ed. Lili Di Puppò, Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, *Writing National Histories. Coming to Terms with the Past.*, *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 8, no. 9 (17 July 2009): 1-16.

within the Soviet system and Soviet nationality policy.¹³⁹ The Georgian narrative is presented as a victim of Russian power in these textbooks, portraying minorities as secret supporters of Russia, justifying the neglect of their rights, including the denial of their right to separate from Georgia.¹⁴⁰

Reisner's views correspond with Berglund & Blauvelt's because both highlight how Georgia's historical narrative marginalises minorities. Reisner notes that textbooks depict minorities as Russian supporters, justifying their neglect. Similarly, Berglund & Blauvelt explain that Saakashvili's historical discourse blamed Russia for Georgia's issues and dismissed ethnic conflicts as artificially provoked, ignoring the xenophobia among Georgians in the 1990s.¹⁴¹

In line with Saakashvili's reforms, the Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection of Georgia announced a Museum Reform programme in 2004. This initiative aimed to establish a new Museum Policy and strategic directions for museum reform in Georgia.¹⁴² However, in 2015 it was noted that significant actions towards these strategic reforms were not implemented, and many critical issues remain unaddressed. This neglect has hindered the development of museums, preventing them from meeting modern international standards and transforming into meaningful cultural and educational centres.¹⁴³

Despite not implementing new museum strategies, Saakashvili managed to establish a new museum that underscored his state-driven nation-building and identity-building efforts: the Museum of Soviet Occupation, located in the National Museum in Tbilisi. This museum recounts the rise of the DRG, its takeover by Soviet Russia, its incorporation into the USSR, and the country's history up to 2006. Following the Russo-Georgian War, a poster was added with the caption "Georgia – Occupation Continues", suggesting an imperialist continuity between the USSR and the Russian Federation (see Figure 3.1).¹⁴⁴ This continuity is also mentioned by Katarzyna Jarosz, who states that "the museum clearly aims to equate the terms 'Soviet' and 'Russian'."¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Reisner argues that the exhibition "holds Russia

¹³⁹ Reisner, 'Interpreting the Past', 4.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁴¹ Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 36.

¹⁴² International Scientific Conference Problems and Development - Perspectives of Post-Soviet Countries Museums, 'Present Situation and Development Perspectives of Georgian Museums'. Tbilisi: ICOM national Committee in Georgia, 2015., 236-237.

¹⁴³ Ibidem, 238.

¹⁴⁴ de Leonardis, 'Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia', 37. Sophio Bilanishvili, 'Overcoming or Forgetting? Public Debate about Soviet Symbols and Monuments in Tbilisi', *Analytical Bulletin* 1, no. 10 (29 March 2017): 47–64. Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 330.

¹⁴⁵ Jarosz, 'National Narratives of "Occupation" in Historical Museums of the Post-Soviet Landscape', 235.

responsible for all the faults of Soviet rule, as if Georgians did not participate at all in the Soviet enterprise."¹⁴⁶

In the museum, Saakashvili's ideas of a Georgian identity come together: the democratic, western-oriented First Republic fell victim to Soviet occupation, destroying its European path. Nowadays, Georgia is back on this European path but remains victim of Soviet/Russian imperialism.



Figure 3.1 Poster added to the Museum of Soviet Occupation in Tbilisi after the Russo-Georgian War. Source: Author (September 2022).

Phase 3.2: Saakashvili 2008-2012

Already during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the Georgian media drew parallels between the Soviet Russian occupation of 1921 and the 2008 conflict to mobilise national sentiments. The First Republic was revived as a "usable past", and after the August War, this narrative intensified.¹⁴⁷ The state's nation-building strategy remained consistent with that before the 2008 War; however, the depiction of Georgia as a persistent victim and Russia as an enduring adversary intensified by linking the 2008 Russian oppression to Soviet oppression. This approach, termed the "Historical Analogy as a Memory Project" by Toria, aimed to consolidate national identity through historical parallels.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Reisner, 'Interpreting the Past', 4.

¹⁴⁷ Jones and Toria, 'Introduction', 211.

¹⁴⁸ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 316-336.

Toria explains that representing this Historical Analogy between the Russo-Georgian War and the Soviet occupation, provided a context for creating new memory sites and supporting state reform programs. Moreover, government officials argued that Russia's military campaign was not to defend Ossetians against Georgian aggression but to remove a pro-Western government in its "backyard", which became part of the Georgian foundational narrative.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Saakashvili has referred to the two de facto states as "occupied territories". The conflict was no longer between Georgia and Abkhazia, but rather between Georgia and Russia, with the Abkhaz being regarded as "hostages" of Moscow.¹⁵⁰

Within this project, new sites of memory were established, such as the "Monument of Heroes" in Tbilisi, which inscribes the names of nearly 3500 people that died for Georgia's independence, from 1928 until 2008.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the adoption of the "Freedom Charter" in 2011, banned Soviet symbols and sought to eliminate totalitarian ideology, further unifying public memory with the national security agenda. This law emphasised Georgia's effort to definitively break from its Soviet past.¹⁵² However, even UNM deputies rejected the opening of KGB archives on Georgians' collaboration, highlighting the complexity of breaking from the Soviet legacy, and reluctance to fully confront and deal with its own past.

Besides creating new memory sites, there was significant action to remove Soviet sites of memory. The removal of the Stalin statue in Gori sparked heated public debate. The government viewed removing these symbols as essential for overcoming the Soviet past. However, some argued they should be preserved for their historical significance. Eventually, the statue was removed in secret in 2010 and replaced with a monument commemorating the victims of the 2008 War.¹⁵³

Saakashvili's references to the Soviet past were repetitive, with no changes in his rhetoric, often recycling the same arguments and phrases during his time in office.¹⁵⁴ This pattern of discourse, particularly prevalent during heightened tensions with Russia, sought to destroy the "mental bridges" linking the Soviet era to the post-Shevardnadze revolutionary period, and positioned Russia as an occupier.¹⁵⁵ However, it became evident that more than

¹⁴⁹ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 322.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas de Waal, 'The Toxic Memory Politics in the Post-Soviet Caucasus.' In: Ninna Möerner, *Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past: A Comparative Study on Memory Management in the Region* (Centre for Baltic and East European studies, CBEES, Södertörn university, 2020), 44.

¹⁵¹ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 328.

¹⁵² Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', 235-238.

¹⁵³ Ibidem, 236. Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 327. Bilanishvili, 'Overcoming or Forgetting?', 56-57.

¹⁵⁴ de Leonardis, 'Memory and Nation-Building in Georgia', 31.

¹⁵⁵ Toria, 'The Soviet Occupation of Georgia in 1921 and the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008', 331.

one bridge was being destroyed. The Rose Revolution's narrative aimed to foster a pro-Western, anti-Russian sentiment among the youth, but was met with resistance. Many Georgians, especially the older generation, still valued aspects of Georgian-Russian history, such as Stalin's legacy, World War II, and Russian cultural influence. This state-led nation-building strategy created a divide and tension between individual and social versus political memories.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, views of society regarding history are now divided along generations that respond to and often contest the state-generated discourse.¹⁵⁷ This highlights the complex and unresolved nature of dealing with the Soviet legacy in Georgia, despite Saakashvili's efforts to promote a new narrative.

The tensions brought about by the uncompromising policies of the Saakashvili government, combined with the rise of a strong opposition led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili and his GD coalition, culminated in the decisive defeat of the UNM in the 2012 parliamentary elections.¹⁵⁸

Phase 3.3: Georgian Dream (2012-2020)

Since Sabanadze's article was published in 2010, prior to the end of Saakashvili's tenure, it raises the question of whether a fourth state-driven nation-building narrative has emerged under the GD administration. In a November 2023 article in Carnegie Europe, Sabanadze touches upon the more recent nation-building narratives of the GD. She states that the GD "did not break with the Europeanising tradition when it came to power in 2012," indicating that GD's initial nation-building narrative was similar to Saakashvili's. However, since her latest article focuses largely on the developments from 2020-2024, she does not elaborate in-depth on the GD's earlier years. To address this gap, this section examines different articles exploring state-led nation-building aspects during the first two tenures of the GD (2012-2020), considering the possible changes in narrative during those years.

Ivanishvili promised the Georgian population a "balanced", "mild", and "diplomatic" approach towards Russia, while blaming the UNM for pretty much all issues, including the Russo-Georgian War.¹⁵⁹ The new administration pursued a policy of "normalisation" with Russia, whilst prioritising Euro-Atlantic integration.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem; Elisabeth Kovtiak, 'A Bridge to the Past: Public Memory and Nostalgia for the Communist Times in Modern Georgia', *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12 (30 July 2018): 32.

¹⁵⁷ Kitaevich, 'History That Splinters', 319.

¹⁵⁸ Berglund and Blauvelt, 'Redefining the Nation', 40.

¹⁵⁹ Batiashvili, *The Bivocal Nation*, 139.

According to Górecki, GD's rise to power did not significantly change the public narrative. However, official statements have reduced the anti-Russian rhetoric compared to previous administrations.¹⁶⁰ This is evident in the commemoration date of the August War, established under the GD. Ivanishvili's Party changed the date to August 8 instead of August 7, signalling that it began with Tbilisi's attack on Tskhinvali rather than with Russia's involvement. Dundua et al., argued in 2017, in line with Górecki, that memory strategies align with politics of victimisation and the creation of a collective victim (Georgia) and oppressor (Russia) memory, echoing Saakashvili's narrative.¹⁶¹ Therefore, it can be concluded that during the first two tenures of GD, there was no significant new phase in nation-building.

3.4 Fourth Phase: Georgian Dream (2020-2024)

Interestingly, the articles on state-led nation-building efforts in Georgia mostly focus on events that transpired until 2019, missing major geopolitical shifts that have taken place since then. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (21 February 2022) had a significant impact on how Georgian society viewed Russia. It is essential to take into account the most recent findings that have not yet been represented in academic literature, as such publications usually take more time. In order to fill this gap, current studies from think tanks, non-governmental organisations, and news articles were consulted, all examining the ideological changes inside the GD party and their implications for state-driven nation-building. A key article is the 2023 Carnegie publication by Sabanadze, in which she identifies the GD's shift to populist conservative nationalism.¹⁶²

Sabanadze observes that Georgia's ruling elite has adopted a populist nationalism as the 2024 election approaches. The GD and its allied parties are using nationalist sentiments for electoral gain. The once prevailing pro-Western discourse has been swapped for a focus on sovereignty, noninterference in internal matters, and respect for traditions, identity, and the church. This shift towards illiberal conservatism is "championed by the likes of Putin".¹⁶³ The new nationalism promoted by GD, characterised by conservatism, populism, and anti-Western sentiment, contradicts the liberal ideals of the European project.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Górecki, 'Politics of Memory in Independent Georgia', 284-285.

¹⁶¹ Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', 235-236.

¹⁶² Sabanadze, 'EU-Georgia Relations'.

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

Before Sabanadze's publication, Nino Samkharadze noted in a May 2023 policy memo from the Georgian Institute of Politics, that the ruling party is shifting towards populist conservatism and distancing itself from the European political family.¹⁶⁵ Samkharadze also observed the adoption of aggressive and confrontational language towards Western allies during GD's third term.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in this shifting narrative, the GD continued its longstanding demonisation of the UNM and began targeting NGOs.¹⁶⁷

The shift is acknowledged by many, including Stephen Jones, who notes that GD's conservative stance was not as present in its initial years.¹⁶⁸ Like Sabanadze, he mentions the increasing emphasis on "Georgian traditional values", which are associated with the family, the church, and binary gender roles. Jones specifically points out the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) in this new ideology. Currently, GD is strongly aligned with the church, whose version of nationalism is anti-Western. These views bring it closer to the Russian Orthodox Church, with which it has maintained a longstanding relationship.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Sabanadze notes that GD has been actively "courting" the church, going so far as to equate criticism of the church with an attack on Georgian culture and identity.¹⁷⁰ According to Jones, GD sees this shift "as a way to cultivate the support of Georgians who continue to live in a state of insecurity – and see the world around them as a source of political and economic threat."¹⁷¹

It is important to consider the role of the GOC, as they are the most trustworthy and influential institution in Georgia, with 94% of Georgians being believers and 84% identifying

¹⁶⁵ "By its nature, populist conservatism is close to the populist radical right and incorporates nativism, authoritarianism and the concept of the 'real people' as its main instruments." Nino Samkharadze, 'Georgian Dream's Populist Conservatism: Fight to Legitimise and Hold On to Power'. Georgian Institute of Politics, 1 June 2023. <https://gip.ge/publication-post/georgian-dreams-populist-conservatism-fight-to-legitimise-and-hold-on-to-power/>, Accessed June 2024, 1-2.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem, 5-6.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Apart from Samkharadze and Sabanadze, the conservatist shift is recognised in the following publications: Nini Gabrichidze, 'Nationalism and Ideology in Present-Day Georgia: Interview with Prof. Stephen Jones'. Civil Georgia, 9 December 2023, <https://civil.ge/archives/573318>, Accessed May 2024.; Joshua Kucera, 'Twenty Years After Rose Revolution, Georgia's Political Parties Hate Each Other. But They Also Largely Agree.' Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 23 November 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/twenty-years-rose-revolution-georgia-political-parties/32695754.html>, Accessed May 2024.; Regis Genté, 'Georgia: Terrible Dilemma for Europe'. European Issues No 674. Foundation Robert Schuman, 20 June 2023. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/674-georgia-terrible-dilemma-for-europe>, Accessed May 2024.; Civil Georgia, 'Georgian Dream's Conservative Drift Now Targets Schools'. 14 December 2023, <https://civil.ge/archives/574287>, Accessed June 2024.; Transparency International Georgia. 'Oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili - the Real Ruler of Georgia and the Architect of Georgia's pro-Russian Shift', 29 May 2024. <https://transparency.ge/en/post/oligarch-bidzina-ivanishvili-real-ruler-georgia-and-architect-georgias-pro-russian-shift>, Accessed June 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Jones, *Georgia*, 228-229.

¹⁷⁰ Sabanadze, 'EU-Georgia Relations'.

¹⁷¹ Gabrichidze, 'Nationalism and Ideology in Present-Day Georgia'.

as Orthodox Christians in 2022.¹⁷² Moreover, the GOC significantly influences societal relations and national identity formation. It is not only a religious institution but also a potent socio-political actor, sometimes competing with the state.¹⁷³ On the one hand, the church has its own memory politics, independent of the state. On the other, high-level church representatives often cite state support as essential for their initiatives.¹⁷⁴ With GD's shift to conservative nationalism, it seems that the memory politics of the church and state are merging, rather than competing, as GD aims to gain broader support. Giorgi Maisuradze even argues that during GD's tenure, the GOC has emerged as the main driving force behind the politics of memory in the country. Additionally, Maisuradze argues that the GD's only successful project in its politics of memory is still the portrayal of Saakashvili's period in power as "nine years of bloodshed".¹⁷⁵

The outbreak of the full-scale War in Ukraine made it increasingly difficult for GD to maintain its balancing act of being pro-European while not antagonising Russia. A significant discrepancy between the government and society became apparent: While society has been vocal in its desire to join the European family, support Ukraine and adopt an anti-Russian stance, the GD has been acting contrary to these wishes, as illustrated in the next paragraphs.

Following the all-out war in Ukraine, the Georgian government refused to participate in economic sanctions and was accused of being a "black hole" that allows Russia to avoid the imposed regulations.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the Georgian administration denied landing permission to a Ukrainian charter plane meant to transport Georgian volunteers to Ukraine.¹⁷⁷ Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili also parroted the Russian narrative by pointing to NATO expansion as the reason of the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian War.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, since February 2022, the GD

¹⁷² Salome Minesashvili, Frédéric Labarre, and Pierre Jolicoeur, 'Dealing with Russia: Georgia's Endeavor to Escape Trampling', in *Asymmetric Neighbors and International Relations*, ed. Thomas R. Klassen, Nara Park, and Ian Roberge (Routledge, 2023), 35.

¹⁷³ Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze, 'National Narration and Politics of Memory in Post-Socialist Georgia', 231.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 239.

¹⁷⁵ Giorgi Maisuradze, 'Politics of Memory In Independent Georgia (Key trends in recent history)'. Tbilisi - South Caucasus Region: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2022. <https://ge.boell.org/en/2023/04/24/politics-memory-independent-georgia>, Accessed April 2024.

¹⁷⁶ Nino Narimanishvili, JAMnews, 'Lack of political will' - Why Georgia does not join anti- Russian sanctions? , 3 June 2022, <https://jam-news.net/lack-of-political-will-why-georgia-does-not-join-anti-russian-sanctions/>, Accessed February 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Veronika Pfeilschifter, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Irena Gonashvili, 'Russia's War in Ukraine - Perspectives from the South Caucasus', *New Eastern Europe* 03, no. 51 (2022): 170.

¹⁷⁸ Natalie Sabanadze, 'EU-Georgia Relations'.

*"The 'Global War Party' is a mysterious international organization frequently mentioned by the Georgian government in its speeches. According to their version, this powerful organisation includes influential Western politicians interested in prolonging the War in Ukraine for as long as possible and spreading it to other countries. However, none of the Georgian politicians adhering to this conspiracy theory [...] can name a single specific member of the 'Global War Party' and do not rush to provide the allegedly available 'facts'." JAMnews, 'Georgian PM's Remarks on "Global War Party" and Venice Commission's "Helpless Facial Expression"'. 23 May 2024,

has labelled the opposition as the "Global War Party"* , accusing the West and Ukraine of pressuring Tbilisi to join the conflict.¹⁷⁹

However, on the societal side, many Georgians openly support Ukraine and protest the government's hesitation to support sanctions and speak up against the war in Ukraine. With memories of the August War in their minds, they denounced Russian aggression and demanded the resignation of Georgia's PM during demonstrations. Moreover, Tbilisi is covered with graffiti, flags and signs condemning Putin and often Russians.¹⁸⁰ Public pressure intensified as Georgia jointly applied for EU candidacy with Ukraine and Moldova in March 2023, "fearing that Georgia would miss the window of opportunity due to the government's reluctance."¹⁸¹

Despite the European Council's decision to grant Georgia candidate status in December 2023, much hesitation remained with regards to the Georgian governments true intentions and willingness to align with the EU values.¹⁸²

This scepticism proved justified as the government reintroduced the controversial Agents Law¹⁸³ in the spring of 2024, alongside a LGBTQI+ propaganda law¹⁸⁴, both mirroring Russian laws.¹⁸⁵ Despite weeks of significant protests by Georgian society and

<https://jam-news.net/kobakhidze-and-the-global-war-party/>, Accessed June 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Ani Chkhikvadze, 'How Georgia Sided With Its Enemy'. Foreign Policy, 7 May 2024.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/07/georgian-dream-tbilisi-protests-foreign-agent-bill-russia-war-ukraine/>, Accessed June 2024.

¹⁸⁰ Appendix A contains examples of such graffiti, flags and signs.

¹⁸¹ Pfeilschifter, Lebanidze, and Gonashvili, 'Russia's War in Ukraine', 170.

¹⁸² In November 2023, Ursula von der Leyen, the EC president, stated that the EC made a positive assessment with regards to Georgia's EU candidacy status, as a sign of support for the genuine aspirations of the overwhelming majority of Georgian citizens to join the EU. However, she added that the Georgian authorities need to do more to mirror these aspirations. This echoed the earlier statement by Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, in September, who said, "the EU's doors are open for Georgia, but the authorities must do their homework better." Natalie Sabanadze, 'EU-Georgia Relations'.

¹⁸³ Shortly after the EU application, the GD announced the introduction of the "Agents Law". This law requires media outlets and NGOs receiving more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register as "agents of foreign influence". Régis Gênte argues that the political intention of the law was to "muzzle pro-Western voices" in Georgia. Moreover, it was designed to force the EU to reject the candidate status application. A text so contrary to European values "could prompt some EU Member States to block Georgia's candidacy, as the European Council's decision must be unanimous", according to Gênte. The GD initially withdrew the law after days of protests, before reintroducing the law in the spring of 2024. Genté, 'Georgia', 3.

¹⁸⁴ Essentially, the LGBTQI+ propaganda law clamps down LGBTQ+ rights, prohibits people from changing their gender, outlaws same-sex couples from adopting children, and bans education and public gatherings it describes as popularising "same-sex family or intimate relationships", as well as "incest". Gabriel Gavin and Dato Parulava. Politico, 25 March 2024, 'Georgia Wants to Ban Changing Gender in Sweeping New Anti-LGBTQ+ Law', <https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-ban-change-gender-new-anti-lgbtq-law-tbilisi/>, Accessed June 2024.

¹⁸⁵ Politico, 'Georgia's Other Russian-Style Law Is Fueling a Bitter Culture War'. 19 May 2024.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-russian-style-law-fueling-culture-war-lgbt-georgian-dream/>, Accessed July 2024.

warnings from the EU, the Agents law was ultimately passed, making it increasingly harder for Georgia to become an EU member state.

In a recent speech, Ivanishvili emphasised the law's importance, claiming, "non-transparent funding of NGOs is the main tool with which you can appoint the authorities of Georgia from abroad."¹⁸⁶ He asserted that from 2004 to 2012, Georgia was governed not by an elected government but by "a foreign agency" that took power after a revolution organised by NGOs.¹⁸⁷ According to Ivanishvili, these NGOs supported the "sadist" Saakashvili regime and are represented by a "pseudo-elite nurtured by a foreign country".¹⁸⁸ He argued that these individuals do not have a homeland and lack love for their country or people because they do not truly consider them their own. In the same speech, Ivanishvili also criticised NATO and the EU, stating that at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, both Georgia and Ukraine were denied NATO membership, leaving them outside the alliance and, additionally, blaming Western politicians for prolonging the War in Ukraine for as long as possible and spreading it to other countries.¹⁸⁹

Ivanishvili's rhetoric, recent developments such as the adoption of the Agents Law, and findings from think tanks, support Sabanadze's argument that a fourth phase of state-driven nation-building has emerged during the last term of the GD. This narrative is characterised by a conservative shift, distancing GD from the West, demonising NGOs, and emphasising "Georgian traditional values". This approach seeks a closer alliance with the GOC and its followers. The only element preserved from earlier nationalism is the demonisation of the UNM.

According to Górecki's analysis, the lack of specialised institutions for developing and implementing politics of memory remains evident under GD. Consequently, GD did not formally conduct a policy of memory politics by 2019. However, the recent stronger alignment with the GOC, which has its own nation-building and memory politics, suggests that the church may insert itself into this gap and will influence and potentially take over GD's politics of memory.

It is evident that state's nation-building in Georgia is still ongoing; Georgian officials are still in the process of defining its identity and place in history and is finding its path for its

¹⁸⁶ Civil Georgia, 'Bidzina Ivanishvili Backs Anti-Western Policies, Threatens Repressions'. 29 April 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/602348>, Accessed June 2024.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem; JAMnews, 'Georgian PM's Remarks on "Global War Party" and Venice Commission's "Helpless Facial Expression"'.

future trajectory. Georgia's national aspiration-agenda is "still incomplete", argued Nodia in 2009.¹⁹⁰ Katie Sartania echoes this sentiment in 2021, questioning whether, thirty years after gaining independence, Georgia's national project has finished.¹⁹¹ As long as Georgians perceive their struggle for independence as ongoing, this question stays unresolved. With the Georgian parliamentary elections in October 2024, the country stands at a crossroads once more, having to choose the direction for its politics of memory.

This chapter has provided insights into how the Georgians remember their past and view Russia, which directly impacts the narratives presented in museums about the Russo-Georgian War. The overview has shown that the fluidity of memory, influenced by political changes and societal (generational) divisions, highlights the non-homogenous nature of how the War is remembered. Additionally, the chapter has illustrated how the Russo-Ukrainian War highlights the significant divide within Georgian society and politics, as the GD's embarked upon a new phase of nation-building. Understanding these more recent developments is important because they play a role in shaping museums, as Chapter 5 will demonstrate. In Chapter 5, the presentation of the findings, the case studies show the state does not make sufficient efforts to commemorate the 2008 war, nor does it actively condemn Russia, paralleling its stance on the Russo-Ukrainian War.

¹⁹⁰ Nodia, 'Components of the Georgian National Idea', 95.

¹⁹¹ Sartania, 'Struggle and Sacrifice', 8.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative research approach to this study. Second, the analytical tools, such as the Winterthur Model for artefact analysis and Thematic Analysis for interview data, are briefly outlined. Additionally, the case study selection and the methodological limitations, including language barriers and researcher reflexivity, are discussed.

4.1 Qualitative Research Approach

This section introduces a qualitative exploration of how Georgian museums remember the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. As stated in the introduction, the August War, while important in Georgia's recent history, paradoxically remains an understudied topic within the field of Memory Studies in Anglophone academic literature. This is especially evident when compared to the bulk of literature regarding (1) the War in the context of International Relations or (2) Memory Studies regarding Georgia's Soviet past. Considering the War's significant role in shaping the contemporary Georgian socio-political environment and identity, the omission is puzzling. The lack of academic resources on how this War is commemorated, particularly within Georgian museums, suggests the need for more scholarly research.

This thesis is guided by the research question "How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why?" and employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is distinguished by its ability "to access 'embedded' processes by focusing on the context of people's everyday lives where decisions are made and enacted".¹⁹² This is in line with the words of Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, who state that interpretive, or qualitative, research "aims at understanding events by discovering the meanings human beings attribute to their behaviour and the external world. The focus is [...] on understanding human nature, including the diversity of societies and cultures."¹⁹³ Therefore, the qualitative research approach suits this research as it looks into the human behaviours involved in curating and creating museum exhibitions.

¹⁹² Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student's Guide to the Craft of Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), 21.

¹⁹³ Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 'How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction', in *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 26.

The qualitative approach in this study consists of two types of data: content from the museums and interviews with museum staff. The next section outlines the methodological framework guiding the analysis of the first dataset, museum artefacts. Thereafter the second dataset is discussed, consisting of interviews, along with the corresponding methodology.

4.2 Winterthur Model

The analysis and interpretation of the museum artefacts is guided by the "Winterthur Model" of E. McClung Fleming, a historian who made significant contributions to the field of material culture studies. His model, developed in 1974, presents a framework for artefact study and is mentioned as an "influential guide for the analysis of material artefacts", by other scholars.¹⁹⁴ The Winterthur model operates with two conceptual tools: first, it breaks down the basic properties of an artefact by using a fivefold classification system; second, it provides a set of four operations to be performed on these properties, as shown in Figure 4.1.¹⁹⁵

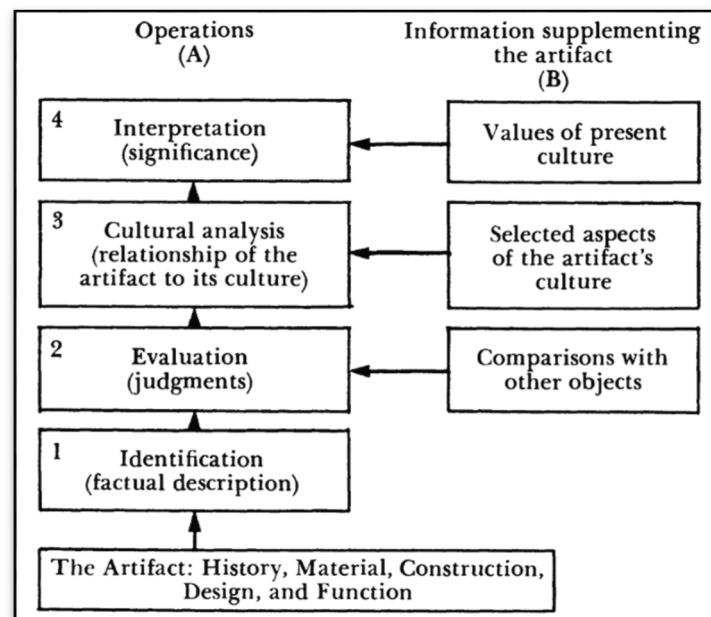


Figure 4.1 Diagram of a model of artefact study

The five inherent characteristics of an artefact according to this model include¹⁹⁶:

¹⁹⁴ Katharine Anderson et al., 'Reading Instruments: Objects, Texts and Museums', *Science & Education* 22, no. 5 (1 May 2013): 1169.

¹⁹⁵ E. McClung Fleming, 'Artifact Study: A Proposed Model', *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974): 153–73.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 156.

1. History: Where and when was the object created, by and for whom, why? Are there any changes in ownership, condition, and function?
2. Material: What is the object made of?
3. Construction: What are the techniques of manufacture?
4. Design: What is the artefact's overall structure, form, style, ornament, and iconography?
5. Function: What are the uses (intended) and roles (unintended) in the artefacts' culture, utility, delight, and communication?

According to McClung Fleming's framework, the four operations to be performed on the five properties help answer to most of the important questions we want to ask about an artefact. These operations are¹⁹⁷:

1. Identification: This is the process of classifying, authenticating, and describing an artefact.
2. Evaluation: In evaluation, both aesthetic judgement and objective comparison play roles. One might assess an artefact's beauty or craftsmanship subjectively or compare it quantifiably against others based on measurable factors like size or rarity.
3. Cultural analysis: Concerns the relations of the artefact to its contemporary culture. It entails the artefact's (concrete and abstract) functions and the various (un)intended roles. In some cases, the artefact can become an agent of major change within its culture.
4. Interpretation: The stage where broader meanings and implications of the artefact are considered in relation to our present-day culture. This can vary depending on the perspectives of the interpreter and the audience.

The artefacts of the three case studies for this thesis were analysed according to the steps of the Winterthur Model. The Winterthur Model helps to methodologically study objects, showing both their historical and cultural importance, as well as their contemporary relevance. By consistently following the same steps for each object, similarities and dissimilarities amongst the artefacts were revealed, as explained in Chapter 5. Using the

¹⁹⁷ McClung Fleming, 'Artifact Study', 156-161.

Winterthur Model to analyse the displayed artefacts in the 2008 War museums, sheds light on how the conflict is understood and valued in the present context.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

This section delves into the interview design and the Thematic Analysis to interpret the second dataset: interviews with museum staff.

In addition to the artefact analysis, in-depth interviews with museum staff were undertaken. The interviews aimed to clarify the intent behind the exhibitions, the decision-making processes, and the curational voice they wish to convey.

One-to-one interviews have been selected as they are often regarded as the most frequently employed instrument within the qualitative researcher's "toolbox".¹⁹⁸ The interviews can be characterised as semi-structured in nature. The key feature of semi-structured interviews is that they let people talk about what matters most to them, rather than having the researcher decide all the topics.¹⁹⁹ This approach is well-suited for this thesis, as it allows interviewees to express their views in depth, providing contextual insights that structured interviews might miss. In line with this type of interview, mostly open-ended questions were asked, leaving room for the interviewees' own thoughts about their exhibitions.

The interviews were structured into three parts (see Appendix A). First, questions aimed to unpack the participants' backgrounds. This was followed by inquiries about the museum's general operation. The third part focused on the museum's 2008 War exhibition, examining the portrayal and intent behind it. The interviews were conducted on-site at each of the respective museums. In Ergneti and Kaspi, the language barrier was navigated with the assistance of an interpreter. At the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori, the interview was conducted in English, without a translator. Each interview spanned approximately one hour.

The analysis of interview data follows the Thematic Analysis method, developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. They define Thematic Analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets

¹⁹⁸ Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research*, 23.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 86.

various aspects of the research topic."²⁰⁰ The reason for choosing this method is that it does not seek to derive theories from the data. Rather, Thematic Analysis specifically pinpoints actionable steps in the practical examination of qualitative data.²⁰¹ The main research question of this thesis seeks to explore and comprehend the recollections of the 2008 War, aiming to describe rather than theorise these memories. The pursuit of understanding in this context relies more on descriptive analysis than theoretical constructs, making Thematic Analysis a suitable fit for this research. Such analysis may be developed by taking the following six steps²⁰²:

1. Familiarising oneself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

The first step entails doing the transcription, which is standard practice in various interviewing methodologies, to create a reliable foundation for subsequent analysis.²⁰³ Due to budgetary constraints, transcription was limited to the content conducted in English. Consequently, the transcription records for Ergneti and Kaspi contain only the questions posed and the corresponding answers as conveyed by the interpreter. Prior to proceeding with steps 2-6, the transcripts were imported into the computer software NVivo, which allows the storage, managing and analysing of qualitative data.²⁰⁴ With the use of NVivo, a coding table was created (see Table 4.1). The codes emerged from a detailed review of the transcripts, the theoretical frameworks and context, with a constant focus on the main research question. Each segment of data was examined for its potential contribution to answering the research question, ensured that each code was closely linked to the purpose of the research, paving the way for a clear and relevant analysis.

²⁰⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (1 January 2006): 77–101. In: Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th Edition (London: SAGE Publications, 2022), 441.

²⁰¹ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 442.

²⁰² Braun and Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', 86-93. In: Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 441.

²⁰³ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 231.

²⁰⁴ The selection of NVivo as the preferred software for data analysis over alternatives such as ATLAS.ti or MAXQDA was informed by its availability as a free resource to students at the University of Glasgow. Kristi Jackson, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo*, 3rd ed., (London: Sage Publications, 2019), 3.

Frames:	Memory Studies	Museum Studies	Components of Georgian Identity	Supplementary
Coding:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collective Memory - Individual Memory - Social Memory (Generational Memory) - Political Memory (National Memory) - Cultural Memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educate - Collect - Conserve - Exhibit (Curational Voice) - Interpret and Engage - Serve and Act - Critical Museology (Decolonisation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Russia as Big Brother, Saviour - Russia as Aggressor, Oppressor - Anti-Soviet sentiment - Pro-Western (Pro-Europe, Pro-NATO) - Victimisation of Georgia - Historical Analogy - Normalisation with Russia - Anti-Saakashvili - Anti-Western (Anti-Europe, Anti-NATO) - Traditional values (Georgian Orthodox Church, Family, Binary Gender Roles) - Anti-Georgian Dream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future Plans - Challenges - State Involvement

Table 4.1 Coding Framework

After creating the coding framework, the coded were connected to parts of the text where they fit best, which allows for a more thematic analysis, making it easier to spot patterns and trends (step 3). The coding process can be seen as "the preparatory step for accessing the data and making them ready for interpretation."²⁰⁵ Step 4 works on improving the coding system by breaking bigger themes into smaller, more specific ones and removing the ones that aren't as important. Step 5 is centred on the categorisation of codes into overarching themes, which involves the intricate development of nuanced themes that are mapped to illustrate the connections between them.²⁰⁶ What do these connections signify? Step 6, producing the report, revolves around the presentation of findings. What themes have emerged from the study? These identified themes contribute to addressing the research question: How is the 2008 War remembered in Georgian museums and why?

Interviews with museum visitors were deliberately excluded to maintain the manageability of the research scope. While visitor experiences and interpretations can undoubtedly add richness to the understanding of a museum's impact, they also introduce a level of complexity that could take away the study's primary objective. This objective is to

²⁰⁵ Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 391.

²⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 441.

analyse the narratives and representations constructed by the museums themselves – narratives that are designed to be the foundational experience for all visitors, regardless of their individual reactions or understandings. An additional factor in this decision is the language barrier; most visitors communicate in Georgian or Russian, languages in which proficiency is required to engage in meaningful, in-depth conversations.

4.5 Case selection

This section outlines the case selection process for museums in Georgia that offer perspectives on the commemoration of the Russo-Georgian War.

First, engagement with students and professors at Ilia State University Tbilisi was used to leverage local knowledge and to understand the landscape of museums that address the subject of the August War. Subsequently, an extensive online search was conducted to compile a list of potential museums. Helpful was the *GeorgianMuseums.ge* database, where most museums in Georgia are gathered.²⁰⁷ This research revealed at least nine museums that, in varying degrees, touch upon the theme of the 2008 War:

1. Georgian National Museum (Subsection Soviet Occupation) in Tbilisi
2. Museum of Battle Glory in Gori
3. Stalin Museum in Gori
4. 2008 War Museum in Ergneti
5. Georgia National Museum of Military Glory in Kutaisi
6. Museum of Occupation in Khashuri
7. Museum of Occupation in Gori
8. Museum of Occupation in Kaspi
9. Museum of Occupation in Lanchkhuti

For a visual on the locations of the museums listed above, see Map 4.1 below.

²⁰⁷ GeorgianMuseums.ge, 'All Georgian Museums in one space'. <https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/>, Accessed March 2024.

occupation and annexation.²⁰⁸ The Kaspi Museum was recommended by the museum staff for in-depth analysis considering its detailed portrayal of the Russo-Georgian War, while the exhibitions in Khashuri, Gori and Lanchkhuti were noted to be very similar but much smaller in scale. Thus, the final selection of case studies intended to include the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori, the Stalin Museum in Gori, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti, and the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi. However, at the Stalin Museum, only an informal conversation with Ketevan Akhobadze, the Financial Director and Chief Curator, was possible, and no recorded interview was conducted. The data from this conversation proved to be insufficient for detailed analysis and was therefore excluded from this study, limiting the group sample to three: the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti, and the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi.

4.6 Limitations

This study has several limitations, as presented in this section. First, subjective perspectives may impact the analysis of artefacts and the interpretation of interviews. To address this, self-reflection throughout the study is applied. This involves recognising the researcher's own background and how it influences the interpretation of data.²⁰⁹

Second, the linguistic barriers present a challenge. Two out of three interviewees for this study were speakers of either Georgian or Russian — languages in which the researcher's proficiency is limited. To overcome this, an interpreter was present during these interviews. However, relying on an interpreter brings along its own limitations. Firstly, nuances in language can be lost or altered in translation, possibly leading to incomplete responses. Secondly, interviewees may provide shorter, possibly less useful responses, if they feel that answers must be repeated or clarified. Lastly, the data analysis is based on the translated transcripts rather than the original spoken language, adding a layer of interpretation to the data analysis process. Despite these limitations, the insights gained through interpreted interviews deepen the understanding of how the 2008 War is remembered in the museums, going beyond artefact analysis.

²⁰⁸ Agenda.Ge. 'President Margvelashvili Visits Occupation Museum in Eastern Georgia', 24 March 2017, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/546>, Accessed April 2024.

²⁰⁹ Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research*, 221.

Chapter 5. Presentation of the Findings

This chapter sets out the empirical part of this study and outlines the findings. The chapter is guided by research questions. As stated in the introduction, the questions are:

Main research question: How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why?

Sub-questions:

- (1) Why were the museums established, what is their purpose?
- (2) What considerations guide the selection and presentation of the artefacts in Georgian museums?
- (3) To what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences?

This chapter first discusses the backgrounds of the three case studies: the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti, and the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori. Then it proceeds to answer the questions by analytically reviewing the datasets of interviews and artefacts. The first and second question are unpacked according to Thematic Analysis and the latter according to the Winterthur Model. The implications of the findings will be outlined in the next chapter dedicated to the discussion.

In some cases, a few adjustments have been made to the quotations in this research to improve clarity and flow. These alterations are not meant to change the meaning of the quoted material and have been kept to a minimum. Adjustments were necessary because the interpreters did not always translate in the first-person perspective, and because English was not the first language of any of the interviewees, making it hard to avoid grammatical errors altogether.

5.1 Backgrounds of the Museums

Museum of Occupation in Kaspi

The Museum of Occupation in Kaspi, also known as the Museum of the Politically Repressed, was opened in 2016, as part of the five-month "No to Occupation" Project. This project was led by the Bridge of Friendship Kartlosi; a non-profit organisation promoting peace and

wanting to resolve the ongoing conflict in the South Ossetia by facilitating dialogue among fragmented communities.²¹⁰ The project aimed to educate youth on Russia-Georgia relations, the Russian occupation and (hidden) annexation, threats from Russia facing Georgia and the entire region and how to cope with all of this.²¹¹ Several museums were set up under this project, including in Khashuri, Gori, Lanchkhuti and Kaspi.

Kaspi is located 60km from Tbilisi, in central Georgia. During Soviet times, the building in which the museum is housed, was a former Soviet police station. After the collapse of the USSR, it became a school gymnasium, which it remains to this day.²¹² Kaspi has vivid memories of both the Soviet Occupation and of the August War; during the USSR, 170 people from Kaspi became victims of political repressions. During the August War, the Russians blew up the main railroad bridge in 2008, cutting off the only railway link between eastern and western Georgia. Additionally, the Kaspi cement factory got bombed by the Russians.²¹³

The history of the repressed was discussed during a project from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), preceding the opening of the museum.²¹⁴ Students learned the history of the repressed peoples of Kaspi, gathering letters and photos. Thereafter, Nino Niparishvili, 41 years old, a teacher at the Kaspi school since 2007, set up the museum together with her students. The interview for the Kaspi case study was conducted with Nino.

The exhibition is set up in a large basement, which used to be a secret pre-trial detention centre with torture chamber during Soviet Georgia.²¹⁵ The basement has two separate rooms: the first is about the repressions during the Soviet Union, with a focus on the victims from Kaspi, and the second focuses on the 2008 War.

²¹⁰ Bridge of Friendship Kartlosi, 'Information about the organisation'. <http://www.kartlosi.org/ge/>, Accessed November 2022.

²¹¹ Agenda.Ge. 'President Margvelashvili Visits Occupation Museum in Eastern Georgia'.

²¹² Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²¹³ Svante E. Cornell, 'Pipeline Power: The War in Georgia and the Future of the Caucasian Energy Corridor', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2009): 136.; The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 'After August 2008: Consequences of the Russian-Georgian War'. September 2008, <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/96508>, Accessed April 2024.

²¹⁴ USAID is the US foreign assistance, which "leads international development and humanitarian efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, strengthen democratic governance and help people progress beyond assistance." U.S. Agency for International Development, 'About Us. Basic Page'. 17 August 2023. <https://www.usaid.gov/about-us>, Accessed June 2024.

²¹⁵ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

The museum is private owned and visiting the museum is for free. They received funding from USAID, the Georgia Presidential Reserve Fund²¹⁶, HeidelbergCement²¹⁷, and two NGOs: Society Biliki²¹⁸ and PH International²¹⁹, while some objects were financed by Nino herself.

2008 War Museum in Ergneti

The museum in Ergneti was opened by Lia Chlachidze on August 8, 2017, which is the official remembrance date of the War under the GD administration. This choice of date possibly reflects Lia's view that the War started with the attack on Tskhinvali by Tbilisi.

Ergneti is located in the north of Georgia, approximately 80km from Tbilisi and 4km from Tskhinvali. Situated on the demarcation line, the small village of Ergneti is surrounded by barbed wire and monitored by border patrols, (see Figure 5.1). Ergneti and the neighbouring villages were heavily impacted by the 2008 War, which is explained best in Lia's own words:

They burnt down 160 houses, they tore the school down, they used to steal and rob people's houses. They robbed the school as well. While they didn't touch the graveyard here, in the neighbouring village, Nikozi, they completely destroyed it. The bones of the dead were thrown out of their own graves.²²⁰

²¹⁶ The Presidential Reserve Fund seems contested. Civil Georgia, Transparency International and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association all reported on how this money is often wrongly spent: "Money from the President and Government's Reserve Fund, according to the law, should be spent only for emergency situations, as in case of flooding etc. But very often these funds are used for covering expenses of various cultural events." Civil Georgia, 'Watchdog: Presidential Reserve Funds Misused', 23 July 2005. <https://civil.ge/archives/108566>, Accessed May 2024.; "Reserve funds of the Government and the President of Georgia are created to finance unforeseen payments in the state budget. The directions of spending from these funds are determined by the government and the president, respectively. It is worrying that uncontrolled spending from reserve funds, which was one of the serious problems of public finance management under the previous government, continues." Mikheil Kukava, 'Spending from Reserve Funds Remains a Serious Problem'. Transparency International Georgia, 3 May 2016. <https://transparency.ge/ge/blog/sarezervo-pondebidan-kharjva-kvlav-seriozul-problemad-rcheba>, Accessed June 2024.; CSO Georgia, 'GYLA Releases Information on Spending of Funds from the Government Reserve Fund'. <https://csogeorgia.org/index.php/en/newsPost/1672>, Accessed June 2024.

²¹⁷ HeidelbergCement is a construction materials company. HeidelbergCement, 'About Us'. <https://www.heidelbergcement.ge/en/about-us.html>, Accessed June 2024. It withdrew from Georgia in 2023 and was purchased by Ivanishvili.

²¹⁸ They promote the employment of persons with disabilities and the optimization of the labour policy in the labour market of Georgia. Society Biliki, 'Project Description'. <https://biliki.org.ge/en/project-description-2/>, Accessed June 2024.

²¹⁹ PH International is a global organization whose mission is "to build strong global communities by fostering civic engagement, cross-cultural learning, and increased opportunities in the digital age." PH International, 'Mission & Values'. https://www.ph-int.org/page_ml/450/, Accessed June 2024.

²²⁰ Lia Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti, 8 February 2023.



Figure 5.1 Georgian border patrol on the demarcation line in Ergneti, just a few meters from Lia's house and the 2008 War Museum. Source: Author (08-02-2023).

Unique to this museum is that Lia is the only staff member; she is the founder, curator and guide. Naturally, the interview conducted for the Ergneti case study was with Lia. She was born in Tskhinvali in 1952, went to school and university there and later worked as a teacher. Her life took a tragic turn during the 1990s Wars when her husband was killed by the Ossetians. Despite this, Lia resisted the urge to hate. "I never truly hated them", she explained, "because I grew up with them and lived with them", "they were my neighbours".²²¹ By choosing forgiveness over resentment, she believes she has preserved her Georgian identity, which is based on "friendship, kindness, and forgiveness", Lia asserts.²²²

When the August War broke out, approximately 15 years later, she initially stayed in Ergneti. After two days, on August 9, Lia and her family fled the War zone and went to Tbilisi. She was shocked by what she encountered in the capital:

It seemed as if nothing was wrong. The restaurants and bars were full. People were happily whistling in the sun as they walked down the street and in the parks. It was astonishing to see how life just went on, while less than eighty kilometres away a War was

²²¹ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²²² Ibidem.

raging. [...] I realised back then that I wanted to do something to keep the memory of this tragedy alive.²²³

After visiting the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi in June 2017, she was certain that she wanted to keep the memory alive by establishing a museum of her own. She set up the museum in the basement of her house, that was destructed during the 2008 War and partly renovated thereafter. Bullet holes are still visible in the car in right next to her garden (see Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2 Bullet riddled car in Ergneti. Source: Author (08-02-2023).

The museum is private owned, and primarily funded by Lia's own expenses, with the exception of some technical equipment bought with a one-time grant from USAID in 2021.²²⁴ Although Lia wanted to use the grant to build stairs into the museum, USAID instructed it

²²³ Lia Chlachidze, cited in: Jarron Kamphorst, "Dit museum laat het ware gezicht van Rusland zien aan de wereld". Trouw, 7 August 2023. <https://www.trouw.nl/buitenland/dit-museum-laait-het-ware-gezicht-van-rusland-zien-aan-de-wereld-bc0ebd99/>, Accessed April 2024.

²²⁴ USAID worked together with Chemonics, a "leading global sustainable development firm", on the Zrda Activity project in Georgia. This project targets Micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises across the country "to help people in rural communities strengthen their skills and productivity and, in turn, contribute to broad-based economic growth and resilience. Partnering with four local grassroots organizations, Zrda also encourages cooperation between the public and private sectors to create a shared vision of improved livelihoods." Chemonics International, 'Who We Are'. <https://chemonics.com/who-we-are/>, Accessed June 2024.

could only be used for items like a TV and cables. Additional funding comes from donations left by visitors.²²⁵

The museum, the only one entirely dedicated to the 2008 War in Georgia, is free for entry. Despite Lia's efforts, the public service hall in Tbilisi couldn't give the museum official status because they do not register museums, and till this date Lia doesn't know how to make her museum official.²²⁶

The Museum of Battle Glory in Gori

The Museum of Battle Glory in Gori, also known as the War Museum and the Museum of Fighting Fame, exhibits the history of the wars that occurred in the region, with a particular focus on the impact on Gori. The museum is located on Stalin Avenue and was established in 1968. This makes it the oldest museum of the case studies; in contrast to the museums in Ergneti and Kaspi, this one was already established during Soviet Georgia, way before the 2008 War. This offers an interesting perspective, as it allows for the examination of how the narrative of military history in this museum has evolved over time.

Gori is most famous for being the birthplace of Joseph Stalin, and the town still fosters a strong Soviet nostalgia and admiration for Stalin. This sentiment was particularly evident in 2012 when approximately 6000 people signed a petition to bring back the Stalin monument, which had been secretly removed two years earlier.²²⁷ This Soviet nostalgia is striking considering the severe impact on Gori during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Gori was bombed four times, the Russian army units took control of the city, forcing thousands of Georgians to flee to Tbilisi.²²⁸

The idea for the museum came from a Colonel from the local military commissariat and was established with the help of the City Committee.²²⁹ However, from 1973 onwards it became part of the Stalin State Museum and was incorporated into the state budget, where it

²²⁵ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²²⁶ Ibidem.

²²⁷ Katrine Bendtsen Gotfredsen, 'Evasive Politics. Paradoxes of History, Nation and Everyday Communication in the Republic of Georgia'. University of Copenhagen, 2013. https://www.academia.edu/9737502/Evasive_Politics_Paradoxes_of_History_Nation_and_Everyday_Communication_in_the_Republic_of_Georgia, Accessed May 2024, 216.

²²⁸ The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 'After August 2008', 46-47.

²²⁹ Colonel Shalva visited an exhibition on the Siege of Leningrad, a section in the Hermitage, and became inspired to create the Museum for Gori and Gori district veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Ana Lolua, 'Representation of Women in the Exhibitions Dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. The Late Socialist Period in Georgia'. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2020. <https://feminism-boell.org/en/2021/01/26/kalta-reprezentatsia-didi-samamulo-omisadmi-midzghvnil-gamopenebshi>, Accessed May 2024, 20.

remains to this day. In her research on the Stalin Museum, Katrine Gottfredsen notes that the Stalin Museum, being situated in the province, "has naturally received relatively little priority in terms of funding or interference from the Ministry of Culture compared to other state museums such as, for instance, the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi."²³⁰ Given that the Battle Glory Museum's budget is incorporated into that of the Stalin Museum, it is reasonable to conclude that the state does not interfere much with the even smaller and relatively unknown Battle Glory Museum.

The director, Daria Vashagashvili, who previously worked as a guide at the Stalin Museum, has led the institution since 1972.²³¹ The exhibition underwent significant changes in 1975 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War Victory, showing the Soviet victory over the Nazis in the museum. Exhibits on the Soviet-Afghan War and missions in Iraq were added when these events occurred.²³² The section on the Russo-Georgian War was included in September 2008 by Daria and her colleagues, just a month after the conflict.

The interview was conducted with Lela Kutkhashvili, a tour guide at the museum. She offers tours in both English and Georgian and has been working at the museum for four months.

5.2 Founding Intentions and Goals

This section addresses the first sub-question: Why were the museums established, what is their purpose?

In line with the importance attributed to educating as a primary function of museums highlighted in the literature review, all interviewees indicated that the museums are seen as tools to preserve history and educate. However, their target audiences differ slightly. Both the museums in Kaspi and Ergneti preserve artefacts for young people and aim to educate this group. The museum in Kaspi also seeks to educate tourists, which is the primary focus of the museum in Gori. Moreover, another commonality between the interviewees in Kaspi and Ergneti becomes apparent; in both their answers about the museum's function, it seems that educating and preserving is driven by anti-Russian sentiment. This contrasts with the museum in Gori, which emphasised the need to present facts and initially avoids naming Russia. The observations mentioned before are illustrated by the following quotes:

²³⁰ Gottfredsen, 'Evasive Politics. Paradoxes of History, Nation and Everyday Communication in the Republic of Georgia', 72.

²³¹ Lolua, 'Representation of Women in the Exhibitions Dedicated to the Great Patriotic War', 20.

²³² Lela Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori, 18 February 2023.

My first function is giving this whole museum an educational point for the students. Not just our students, but also from other schools and university students too. It is also for the American soldiers that are here from NATO. They are interested in history of Georgia, and this is the best place for them to understand why we do not want Russia. The main function of this museum is to break the myth that Russia has done anything good or will do anything good for anyone.²³³

When specifically asked what the main audience is that they're trying to reach, Nino said:

The youth and the foreigners that come here. We want to give them a chance to understand that we always fought. And that our place is next to the civilised world.²³⁴

The anti-Russian sentiment is echoed in Lia's answer, who states that:

I wanted to preserve the artefacts for the future generations. Otherwise, they would have been thrown away. So, they would always know what Russia did to us. [...] The aim for his museum is to preserve the memory of identity so that history cannot be subjected to falsification. Even though my grandchildren did not experience this war, they can get a feeling for what happened by visiting this museum. They get to come close to this experience and naturally understand what their people went through. [...] This museum is for showing specifically how it was affected by the imperial desires and ambitions of Russia.²³⁵

However, in Gori, Lela does not speak bad about Russia. According to her, the main purpose of the 2008 exhibition, is:

[...] to show the history of our region and our state. To show the situation of the war which was going on in our city during these 5-days. It is mainly to show and to give information to tourists about what was going on in 2008 here.²³⁶

Interestingly, when asked what the museum narrative is, Lela again did not mention Russia, which is striking given that Russia fought in Georgia, and that Gori was severely bombed by the Russians. This is exemplified by the following quote:

We lost the territories. The narrative is to display that to the people. [...] Many people were killed, and many officers and citizens were killed. These are the facts we wanted to show. Six people are still missing. This is the narrative; to show everything.²³⁷

²³³ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²³⁶ Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori.

²³⁷ Ibidem.

Only when specifically asked how they speak about Russia in their exhibition, did Lela elaborate. It became evident that the anti-Russian sentiment, which was immediately clear when speaking to the interviewees from Kaspi and Ergneti, is missing in Gori. This is illustrated by Lela's answer:

We want friendship relations towards our neighbours and towards other countries. The Russian role is very big because they invaded our territory. So, we will tell the history of the Russian army that came to our country and that we lost territory. I already told you that many Russians [that are visiting the museum] are saying that they are sorry for what is going on.²³⁸

When asked if it was difficult to talk about the role of Russia, Lela reasserted that the museum is focused on presenting the facts and that she did not experience any difficulty: "For me? For us? No, no, it's no problem, it's all facts."²³⁹

The quotations have shown the importance of educating as a driving factor in the establishment of the museums. Another possible explanation for their creation is to address the educational gap left by the state. When asked about the state's efforts to educate and commemorate the August War, both Nino and Lia asserted that the government is not doing enough. Even though they did not explicitly link the establishment and function of their museums to this gap, they both expressed that the state should be more proactive in educating the public about the August War. This is illustrated by their statements:

I think there should be more education. There should definitely be more. Our government should definitely participate more. We have seen ourselves that it has so much meaning when they do; because at the time that the museum was in the making, the mayor helped a lot financially and in every other way he could. He attended every meeting he could, which meant a lot.²⁴⁰

When Lia was asked if the state does enough to explain to the future generation what has happened during the 2008 War, she replied with a short and concise "no". When asked how the state should be involved regarding the 2008 memory, she stated that:

Tv channels, journalists, they should all be coming here. The government should be facilitating that. They have to make sure that they have this curiosity to come here and to show the whole country what it is like. They have to be curious about what is happening here.

²³⁸ Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori.

²³⁹ Ibidem.

²⁴⁰ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

Apart from the educational function, other functionalities which are also described in the literature, come to the forefront. More obvious is the fact that all museums collect and exhibit artefacts, but they also conserve them. Additionally, all museums engage with their visitors via tours.

In Kaspi and Ergneti, the museum founders themselves serve as tour guides and present in Georgian. Lia does not mind speaking in Russian, whereas Nino prefers to speak in Georgian, although she does speak Russian. Nino mentioned that knowing Russian is important for her and her students because "it is good to know the language of your enemy".²⁴¹ In Gori, there are two tour guides: Lela, the interviewee, who conducts the English and Georgian tours, and another guide who handles the Russian-language tours. Here, the museum director is not involved in guided visits. This division of linguistic preferences and roles among the museum staff reflects the level of anti-Russian sentiment, which seems the heaviest in Kaspi, then Ergneti and to almost no degree in Gori. Moreover, it also indicates varying levels of professionalism. While the personal involvement of museum founders in Kaspi and Ergneti highlights a passionate, though informal, approach to museum management, the structured delegation of tour responsibilities in Gori suggests a more formal and professional organisational framework. A possible explanation for this is the lack of financial resources in the museums. Lia did express her desire to have people working in her museum:

I would like to hire staff; a guide because I do not have a guide right now and I do my own showings.²⁴²

Besides her wish to hire staff and have a tour guide, she would like to expand the ways in which she engages with her visitors:

It would be good to transform this place into a tourist spot where tourists can visit. It would be nice to have tourists stay, to have them participate in this culture, but now I do not have the capabilities. They can see how *churchkhela's* are made and things like that. This museum could provide an entire experience for them.²⁴³

To conclude, the findings presented in this section reveal patterns of similarity across the dataset regarding the first sub-question: Why were the museums established, what is their

²⁴¹ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²⁴² Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²⁴³ Ibidem.

purpose? All interviewees emphasised that their primary motivation was to preserve history and to educate the public. However, a dissimilarity can be observed in the driving factor behind educating amongst the three museums. In Kaspi and Ergneti, this underlying motivation seems to be driven by anti-Russian sentiment, aiming to inform the public about Russia, which is their absolute enemy. In contrast, the Gori Museum refrained from using anti-Russian rhetoric as a driving factor. Another possible underlying motivation behind the desire to educate, is to address the educational gap left by the state. However, Nino did praise the mayor's efforts in Kaspi, highlighting the role of local participation. In addition to educating, they all participate in collecting, conserving, exhibiting and engaging with visitors via tours.

5.3 Selecting and Displaying Artefacts

This section addresses the second sub-question: What considerations guide the selection and presentation of the artefacts in Georgian museums?

What comes to the forefront in the data analysis, is the lack of a regulation in gathering artefacts among all museums, as they seem to accept everything. The reasoning for displaying certain artefacts while not displaying others, are quite unclear, especially in the cases of Ergneti and Gori. In Kaspi, it becomes evident that there were very few historical objects left, so they collected what they could.

One possible reason behind this take-it-all approach could be the lack of financial resources, which was mentioned by all museums when asked about challenges in creating the exhibition. However, there is no further explanation for why certain information was chosen for display. Overall, this lack of reasoning raises questions about the existence of a (professional) policy for artefact display.

Another similarity that arises from the dataset among all three museums, is the role of the local society. Perhaps as a consequence of financial restraints, the museums all heavily rely on artefact donations. The local society all contributed to the museums' collection by donating their artefacts such as uniforms and helmets, as mentioned before. This suggests a strong reflection of the social memory in the museums. These abovementioned observations are illustrated by the following quotes:

The information on the banners came from archival material. For every document we paid money, we had to purchase the information. [...] The typewriter was found in the

basement of our city hall. [...] The uniforms were given to us by the grandfather of one of the students. [...] There were very few objects here because they were all destroyed. Anything that we could get our hands on, we just grabbed it.²⁴⁴

We met families of participants of the 2008 War and collected materials and made this exhibition. [...] Sometimes the family members brought the uniforms and different things here to the museum. [...] We have our own space where we keep all materials, which are important. So, we have more materials which are not here [on display].²⁴⁵

When walking through the museum in Ergneti, Lia said that people brought the artefacts themselves and that she took everything. Moreover, she stated that:

If I have multiple, similar artefacts, I do take them but keep some of them safe somewhere else. Once, I received a helmet which had a bullet hole in it. The person who wore it was obviously shot in the head. I didn't use it because it has such a bad aura, and I didn't want to display it in the museum.²⁴⁶

The struggle with finances is reflected in the following remarks:

The biggest challenges in creating the exhibition were the financial aspect and where to start. The basement is 380 square meters, a pretty big space for an exhibition and the money was not easy to get. Being how old it is and how long it had been out of use; half the basement was filled with ground dirt. Getting that out of here was one of the biggest parts of that financial aspect.²⁴⁷

There was not resistance from the state or anything like that. The only real challenge was the financial stuff. There are lots of things I want to do. I want to use high-tech things for this museum, such as showing a film or a video, but I don't have real equipment for it. So, the real challenge is financial stuff.²⁴⁸

Funding is the main [difficulty] to change the situation here.²⁴⁹

Another consideration arises from the need to draw historical parallels. In line with the significance of the term "Historical Analogy" highlighted in the literature review, which depicts the 2008 War as part of a prolonged occupation, interviewees from Kaspi and Ergneti emphasised that the occupation has been ongoing for much longer than 2008. However, there

²⁴⁴ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²⁴⁵ Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori.

²⁴⁶ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²⁴⁷ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²⁴⁸ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²⁴⁹ Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori.

is a difference in starting point of the analogy; Lia draws a parallel between 1921, marking the start of Soviet occupation, and 2008. In contrast, Nino mentions that the occupation began three centuries ago, referring to the Treaty of Georgievsk.²⁵⁰ The parallels are illustrated by the following quotes:

The occupation began in 1921 and still continues to this day.²⁵¹

2008 is the newest and most relevant case of occupation right now, so it's important to show it alongside the past to really get the full picture. It's impossible to sidestep the issue and the topic. [...] Tell whoever you can reach about how big of fighters the Georgians are and always have been. Tell them about the existence of this place that shows that our history has been repeating itself for three centuries now. Tell them that you get *déjà vu* when you walk through here. So much has repeated itself over and over again.²⁵²

This sense of Historical Analogy is absent in the Gori Museum, which presents all the wars that (Soviet) Georgia participated in since World War Two and does not focus on prior occupations. Therefore, there was no question directed at this Historical Analogy. However, the interviewee was asked whether it was difficult to show that Georgia fought as part of the Soviet Army for many years under Moscow's direction, alongside the 2008 War in which they fought against Moscow. Again, it became clear that Russia was not demonised in this narrative. This history is about Georgia's experiences and contributions, rather than glorifying or condemning the Soviet Union, as exemplified by Lela's answer:

It is the history, these are the facts. We must show the history of the wars during Soviet times and the new ones. In the Second World War, so many of our citizens were killed, which is very important. It's not about the Soviet Union, it's about Georgia. We must show everything.²⁵³

Historical Analogies of Russian aggression are not only drawn between the past and present in Georgia, but also in a different region: Ukraine. There is a small reference to the Russo-Ukrainian War in Lia's museum: a donation box decorated with the Ukrainian flag, meant to collect money for victims from Ukraine. Similarly, Nino expressed her desire to dedicate part

²⁵⁰ The Treaty of Georgievsk, signed on July 24, 1783, was a bilateral agreement between the Russian Empire and the eastern Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. This treaty established Eastern Georgia as a protectorate of Russia.

²⁵¹ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²⁵² Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

²⁵³ Kutkhashvili, Interview War Museum Gori.

of the exhibition "to every Georgian that died in the Ukraine War, after the war has ended", thereby paralleling Ukraine and Georgia as victims of Russian Aggression.²⁵⁴

To conclude, the findings showed three similarities in the dataset regarding the second sub-question, What considerations guide the selection and presentation of the artefacts in Georgian museums? First, financial constraints limit the ability of museums to obtain artefacts. This leads to the dependency of donations, which come largely from the local community. Second, a lack of a structured policy for artefact display, results in an incoherent, unclear approach displaying the selected artefacts. Third, in the cases of Kaspi and Ergneti, the selection is also guided by a desire to draw historical parallels, indicating that certain artefacts are selected and displayed to highlight the long-standing struggle against Russian occupation, not only in Georgia, but also in Ukraine.

5.4 Comparative Analysis of Artefacts

This section explores the third sub-question: To what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences?

A few overall observations emerge from examining the types of artefacts. There are many pictures on display, but there is not much informative text. Notably, there is no informative text on the causes of the 2008 War at all. The available text is in Georgian in all three museums, with Gori being the exception, where the exhibition from the Great Patriotic War until the 1990s includes Georgian and Russian texts. The written information on the Wars of the 1990s and the 2008 War in the Gori Museum are mostly in Georgian, with a few references in English and just one in Russian. The welcoming sign above the entrance of the Gori Museum is in Georgian, Russian, and English. Besides pictures, the museums also exhibit soldiers' uniforms, medals, and bombshells. There is no multimedia type of artefact in any of the museums.

By following the steps of the Winterthur Model, artefacts were identified, evaluated, subjected to cultural analysis, and interpreted. Consistently applying the same steps to each object revealed similarities and dissimilarities amongst the artefacts. These similarities and differences are categorised into three themes, which are elaborated upon in this section and demonstrated through corresponding artefacts and their accompanying models.

²⁵⁴ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

Historical Analogies

The first theme that can be differentiated – amongst the museums in Kaspi and Ergneti – is Historical Analogies. The parallels with the 2008 War and the longer historical occupation of Georgia were already mentioned in the interview data analysis earlier in this chapter, and come again to the forefront in the artefact analysis. Lia draws a parallel between 1921 and 2008, with a poster stating that the "Occupation Continues 1921 - ", where the dash indicates that the occupation remains ongoing to this day. The museum in Kaspi refers to the Treaty of Georgievsk as the start of Russia's long occupation over Georgia, displaying an informative panel with photographs of the treaty and its secret articles. However, this theme is absent in the Gori Museum. This absence can be partly explained by the museum's focus on wars that were fought within Georgia rather than on the occupation itself. At the same time, it becomes clear that the museum in Gori refrains from demonising the Soviet Union and Russia altogether and does not use the word occupation at all. The analogy is exemplified by the following artefacts:

Figure 5.3 Display in Kaspi Museum
Source: Author (10-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

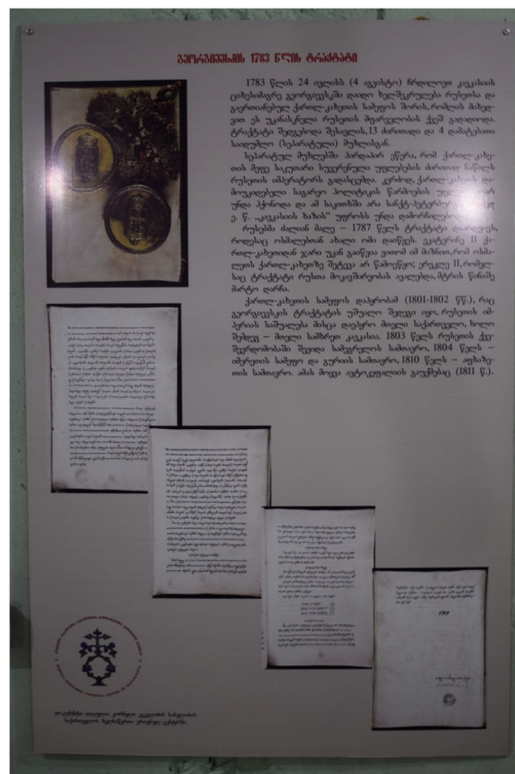
(Title) Treaty of Georgievsk of 1783

On July 24 (August 4), 1783, a treaty was signed at the fortress of Georgievsk in the North Caucasus between Russia and the unified Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. According to this treaty, the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti came under Russian protection. The treaty consisted of an introduction, 13 main articles, and 4 additional secret (separate) articles.

The secret articles explicitly stated that the King of Kartli-Kakheti would transfer the majority of his sovereign rights to the Russian Emperor. Specifically, Kartli-Kakheti would no longer have the right to conduct an independent foreign policy and would be subject not to Saint Petersburg but to the so-called "Chief of the Caucasian Line."

The Russians violated the treaty as early as 1787 when they started a new war with the Ottomans. Catherine II withdrew Russian troops from Kartli-Kakheti, supposedly to prevent an Ottoman attack on the region. Consequently, King Erekle II, who was obligated by the treaty to ally with Russia, was left alone against the enemy.

The annexation of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (1801-1802), a direct result of the Treaty of Georgievsk, allowed the Russian Empire to conquer all of Georgia and subsequently the entire South Caucasus. In 1803, the Principality of Samegrelo came under Russian rule, followed by the Kingdom of Imereti and the Principality of Guria in 1804, and the Principality of Abkhazia in 1810. This was followed by the abolition of autocephaly (independence) of the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1811.



4) Interpretation: The panel highlights the historical ties and conflicts between Georgia and Russia, offering insights into long-standing impacts on national sovereignty. By including the four secret documents that explain the loss of sovereign rights, the visual emphasis is on this part; it reflects that Georgia has been under occupation three centuries now.

3) Cultural Analysis: The panel reflects effort to educate the public about Georgian history. Moreover, it intentionally emphasises Russia's long influence over Georgia.

2) Evaluation: The panel has a professional layout. The plaque is in good condition and is the same size as most of the displays with text in the museum.

1) Identification: The panel is a museum display panel, featuring information from the archives used by Nino and her students to describe the Treaty of Georgievsk and its consequences for Georgia.

Artefact: The display panel is rectangular, made of hard plastic, and screwed onto the wall. It contains text in Georgian, communicating the history of the Treaty of Georgievsk. It also features five images: a copy of the treaty and the four additional secret articles. It was created between 2015-2016 for the museum in Kaspi.

Figure 5.4 Display in Ergneti Museum

Source: Author (08-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

(Top left) Occupation Continues
1921-

(Bottom right) Final Occupation since
1921 until today



4) Interpretation: This poster symbolises the ongoing struggle for Georgian independence and resistance against Russian aggression. Different audiences are possibly reminded that the oppression is transgenerational, and impacts younger and older Georgians, sharing a similar past.

3) Cultural Analysis: The poster serves as an educational tool, highlighting the prolonged occupation. The main text leaves the period after 1921 open with a dash, indicating the occupation has no end date. The black and white photo shows the Red Army taking over Tbilisi in 1921, marking the start of the long occupation. The picture of the Russian Army invading Georgia and being only 66 km away from its capital, connects the recent conflict to the older one. The barbed wire symbolises the 2008 creeping annexation, with the demarcation line separating Georgia from the occupied territories.

2) Evaluation: The poster is in good condition. In comparison with the other posters and plaques in the museum, this one is smaller and does not take up as much space. This poster is also more creative, combining different elements: a recent picture (the soldiers with flag), with an older one (in black and white), as well as the barbed wire.

1) Identification: The poster is for museum display and features barbed wire, Russian soldiers with a Russian flag posing in front of a road sign in Georgia, 66km from Tbilisi, and soldiers in black and white against the backdrop. The text communicates in Georgian that the occupation started in 1921 and is lasting until today.

Artefact: This rectangular poster was created between 2019-2023 for the museum in Ergneti with help from The Georgian Institute for Security Policy (GISP). The poster is placed on an easel for display.

Personalised Victimisation

A visible theme evident in all three museums is the theme of Personalised Victimisation. Each museum dedicates substantial space to exhibiting photographs and uniforms of the Georgians who fought and died in the 2008 War. The focus here is not on presenting facts or figures but on humanising the narrative by highlighting the individuals from the respective regions who lost their lives during the 2008 confrontation.

It seems that the exhibitions foster a personal connection between the visitors and the fallen soldiers. In Kaspi, alongside photographs, there are relatively lengthy biographies that enhance this personal connection. Both Kaspi and Gori museums display photographs of individuals from their respective towns, while the Ergneti Museum features images of victims from a battle in Shindisi, a village merely 10km from Ergneti. This potentially helps visitors relate more closely to the location they are at and the people from there that died.

In Gori, the uniforms on display were donated by the families of the fallen soldiers, further strengthening the social memory preserved in these museums. This approach ensures that the memory of the deceased is not only remembered but felt by those who visit. This theme is illustrated by the following three artefacts:

Figure 5.5 Display in Kaspi Museum
Source: Author (10-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

(Title) Heroes of the August 2008 War

(Top left) Tigishvili Gela, was born on May 25, 1972, in the village of Kodistskaro, Kaspi region. At the age of 14, he left his village for Tbilisi to study at a physical school. He was later called up for military service in Ukraine. After serving for a year and six months in Tbilisi, he fought in the war in Abkhazia and subsequently worked in the military police. He also served in Kosovo. From 2006, he was part of the Fourth Gate Brigade of Vaziani. Tragically, he was killed in August 2008 during a Russian air raid near Tskhinvali and was initially considered missing. In 2009, he was posthumously awarded the Order of Vakhtang Gorgasli, 1st degree. On August 7, 2012, he was laid to rest at the cemetery in his home village of Kodistskaro, Kaspi region.

(Top right) Koshadze Kakha was born on March 4, 1986, in Tbilisi. He graduated from School No. 160 in Tbilisi and then pursued dental studies. After completing his education, he was drafted into the army, serving in the military engineering company of the 2nd Infantry Brigade of Senaki. On August 11, 2008, during the Shindisi battle, he was killed in a clash with the enemy. The battle concluded by 1 o'clock, and his family received confirmation of his identity through DNA testing on October 11. Kakha was laid to rest at the Mukhatghedi Brothers' Cemetery. Posthumously, he was awarded the Order of Vakhtang Gorgasli, III degree.

(Center) Bezhuashvili Ioseb (Soso), was born on December 10, 1987, in the village of Aghayan, Kaspi district. He graduated from the high school in his village and served in the 4th Infantry Brigade, 42nd Battalion. Soso Bezhuashvili died heroically in Tskhinvali on August 8, 2008. DNA analysis confirmed his identity among the bodies transferred in November 2008, and his family received this confirmation on January 3, 2009. He was laid to rest in the village Aghaiani of Kaspi region. Posthumously, he was awarded the Order of Vakhtang Gorgasli, II degree.

(Bottom left) Balkhamishvili Albert was born on September 15, 1958, in the Vaziani, Tbilisi. A professional pilot and Major, he spent 25 years in civil aviation, followed by 8 years in military aviation. On August 8, 2008, while awaiting orders to fly to Kopitnari, the enemy attacked Marneuli airport. Among his crew of four, only one survived, while three, including Albert, lost their lives. He was buried on August 12 in the village of Bozhami, Kaspi region. Posthumously, he was awarded a medal for bravery.



- 4) Interpretation: In present-day culture, the poster represents the resilience of the Georgian people and their victimhood at the same time. The emphasis is not on general numbers, but on personal stories and how these people died defending Georgia. They were killed during war, and the text "Stop Russia", once more emphasises who is to blame for the lives that were lost in the Kaspi region. The text is also in English, which indicates that the museum aims to make sure foreign visitors also have a level of understanding.
 - 3) Cultural Analysis: The panel serves as an educational tool, informing visitors about fallen soldiers from the region. It also functions as a memorial tool; emotions are triggered by the biographies that helps visitors to connect the soldiers. They get to know them and learn about the (heroic) ways they died.
 - 2) Evaluation: The plaque is in good condition and is the same size as most of the displays in the museum. However, the text is much longer in comparison to the other displays. Similarly, the focus is on the local actors with emphasis on Russia as the villain. Contrastingly, it is one of the few displays with text in English, as the others are in Georgian.
 - 1) Identification: The panel is a museum display panel, giving information about four soldiers from the Kaspi region that died during the 2008 War. The profiles include personal information such as where they grew up and went to school, military service, details of their deaths and the posthumous awards. The only text in English reads: "Stop Russia".
- Artefact: The display panel is rectangular, made of hard plastic, and screwed onto the wall, which is covered in camouflaged netting. It contains four photographs of soldiers with their biographies. It was created between 2015-2016 for the museum in Kaspi.

Figure 5.6 Display in Ergneti Museum
Source: Author (08-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

(Title) Heroes of Shindisi

The texts below the photographs are the names of the killed soldiers.



4) Interpretation: Similar to figure 5.5, the poster represents the bravery of the Georgian people and their victimhood at the same time. It is not about the numbers, or historical facts, but about soldiers from the Ergneti region that sacrificed their lives to defend Georgia. A reference to the killer is absent. Moreover, the black-white and sepia filter could be applied to convey a sense of mourning and historical

3) Cultural Analysis: The poster serves as mainly a memorial tool, honouring the soldiers that were killed in the Shindisi battle. It does not educate or inform about the specifics of the battle. By putting faces to the names, the display (unintentionally) highlights the personal aspect, possibly evoking emotional reactions from visitors.

2) Evaluation: The display is in good condition. It is slightly smaller than other displays and plaques in the museum. It is the only display in black and white and sepia.

1) Identification: The artefact serves as museum display. Who provided the photographs is unclear; it could be public information because the Shindisi battle is infamous in the 2008 War, or they were provided by friends and family of the killed soldiers.

Artefact: This rectangular display was created around 2018 for the museum in Ergneti and is hanging onto the wall of the basement. It features black and white or sepia photographs of killed soldiers with their respective names in Georgian. The title reads "Heroes of Shindisi".

Figure 5.7 Displays in Gori Museum
Source: Author (18-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

(Title) Only the chosen ones are destined to sacrifice themselves for the motherland

(Subtitle) Gori 2008



4) Interpretation: Similar to figure 5.5 and 5.6, the poster represents the bravery of the Georgian people and their victimhood at the same time. It is not about the numbers, or historical facts, but about people from Gori that sacrificed their lives to defend Georgia, or that fell victim to the conflict, as is referenced in the title. Any reference to the killer remains absent and there is no informative text about the War, leaving much open for interpretation.

3) Cultural Analysis: The displays function as a memorial, honouring the soldiers and citizens from Gori that were killed during the War. By putting faces to the names, the display (unintentionally) highlights the personal aspect, possibly evoking emotional reactions from visitors. Moreover, the displays function as an educational tool, showing the impact of the war on the local society.

2) Evaluation: The display lacks a coherent style. Only the first four rows on the left share a similar style, with photographs against the same sepia background and filter. The other photographs vary in size, with some including names and other not. They appear to be glued on. In comparison, the other artefacts in the 2008 exhibition are similar. They look very put together, with texts printed out and glued or pinned on, rather than professionally displayed with proper materials.

1) Identification: The artefact serves as museum display and was created by the museum director with help from Gori locals. The photographs depict victims of the 2008 war, including soldiers and citizens (recognised by their civilian clothing). Additionally, the images show destroyed buildings, homes, and wounded civilians.

Artefact: The two rectangular displays were created shortly after the August War, most likely before the opening of the exhibition in September 2008, for the museum in Gori. The displays feature around 120 photographs, and the main title reads "Only the chosen ones are destined to sacrifice themselves for the motherland" and the subtitle reads "Gori 2008".

Russia as the Aggressor

The third theme that emerged from the dataset focuses on the role of Russia as the Aggressor and is particularly evident in the exhibitions in the museums of Kaspi and Ergneti. This trend already emerged during Mikheil Saakashvili, as outlined in detail in the chapter on the History of Memory in Georgia. This narrative is reflected in these two museums, whereby emphasis lies with the role of Russia as the villain, explicitly identified as the occupier and the enemy. The responsibility for the 2008 War is clearly attributed to Russia and its imperialist ambitions.

However, this theme is absent in the Gori Museum. In Gori, there is no mention of Russia; the exhibition avoids naming Russia altogether. Instead, it centres on the Georgian victims of the August War, showcasing photographs, uniforms, honorary medals, and a piece of a bomb, without providing a single explanatory panel about the 2008 War.

This theme is also visible in Figure 5.5 above, where next to the Kaspi victims of the 2008 War, there is a text saying, "Stop Russia", clearly linking the deaths of the soldiers to Russia, who killed them, and therefore they must be stopped.

In this context, it is also important to note what is forgotten and silenced. In Kaspi and Ergneti, all responsibility for the 2008 War is attributed to Russia, while the role of the separatists is overall absent from the narrative. There is not one mention of the separatists in all three exhibitions. However, the separatists have played an important role in the conflicts that Abkhazia and South Ossetia have had with Georgia, particularly in the last century.

As discussed in chapter 1, following the disintegration of the Russian Empire in 1917, a relatively unified Georgian nation existed, possessing a clear sense of its territory. Despite this sense of nationhood, "there was still considerable dispute as to what actually constituted Georgia's rightful territories among other groups such as the Abkhazians and South Ossetians."²⁵⁵ This led to the conflicts of the 1920s, in which Abkhazia and South Ossetia already fought for a higher level of self-determination.

A hundred years later, the separatists and Georgians were still fighting over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Prior to the Russo-Georgian War, there were skirmishes between Georgia and the separatists, who were backed by Russia. The skirmishes escalated into a wider Russo-Georgian conflict where the separatists and Russia fought on the same side. As stated by David Darchiashvili, the separatist sentiments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were fuelled by

²⁵⁵ Revaz Gachechiladze, 'Geopolitics and Foreign Powers in the Modern History of Georgia: Comparing 1918-21 and 1991-2010', in *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen F. Jones, vol. 52 (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 18.

Russia through military and economic assistance. There have long been separatist Ossetian and Abkhaz projects of a local nation-building nature.²⁵⁶ However, any role and history of the separatists remain absent in all the museums.

When interviewees were asked about the role of the separatists, Lia stated that the occupants are Russians, who are the main aggressors, and apart from them there are the separatists. She noted that the Ossetians were "falling into this trap of violence against Georgians", perhaps implying that Russia set this trap.²⁵⁷ In a different interview with JAMnews, Lia clearly attributed the violence to an external force:

Back then, no one would lock their front doors because the city was full of kindness. We never distinguished people by nationality. I could not even fathom that one day we would talk about ethnic Ossetians, and they would talk about ethnic Georgians. We were one. At the institute it didn't matter if you were a Georgian or Ossetian. We were all friends. I don't understand how a third force managed to ruin our relationship, to divide us and make us fight.²⁵⁸

Lia clearly states that it was a third force, Russia, that instigated this hate between the Georgians and Ossetians. Similarly, Nino remarked:

Every separatist movement in Abkhazia and Ossetia was led by Russia, so you can't not mention Russia when talking about separatist movements. The idea behind them was Russia, who also provided the military equipment that the separatists needed.²⁵⁹

These quotes show that the museums mainly blame Russia for the War and view the separatist movements as created and fuelled by Russia, which is in line with Darchiashvili's arguments. Moreover, this theme is demonstrated through the following two artefacts:

²⁵⁶ Darchiashvili, 'Russo-Georgian War of August 2008', 15, 18.

²⁵⁷ Chlachidze, Interview War Museum Ergneti.

²⁵⁸ Lia Chlachidze, in: YouTube, 'Woman Established a War Museum in Her Basement, in the Village of Ergneti, Georgia', 8 October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDsSnbpap-o>, Accessed April 2024.

²⁵⁹ Niparishvili, Interview Museum of Occupation Kaspi.

Figure 5.8 Display in Kaspi Museum
Source: Author (10-02-2023)

Translation Georgian – English

(Title) The Aftermath of the 2008 War

(Main text centre)

The war of August 2008 inflicted severe damage upon the country, particularly impacting the Shida Kartli region and its residents. Russian aggression extended its reach into the Kaspi, leaving a lasting impact. In the early hours of August 12, two Russian planes targeted the city of Kaspi, dropping shells that damaged the railway infrastructure and destroyed nearby buildings. Tragically, 67-year-old Mevlud Merebashvili lost his life in the collapse of one such building. The bridge over the Lekhura River sustained significant damage, with shells striking both sides and disrupting electric, gas, and communication lines. The resulting blast wave further damaged nearby houses and institutions, including a cement factory. On August 13, Russian military forces deployed heavy equipment in the village of Igoeti, causing panic among the residents of Kaspi who began to flee the city. Only the road to Kavtishkevi remained open, linking them to Tbilisi. Kaspi resembled a ghost town as most of its population had evacuated, yet essential services such as food, electricity, and gas continued to be supplied. By August 15, Russian military presence in Kaspi intensified, with soldiers engaging the remaining locals and saying that they were there to protect the city. On August 16, a deliberate act of sabotage targeted the railway line, causing widespread economic disruption not only in Georgia but also affecting Azerbaijani and Armenian economies reliant on Georgian railways. This destructive act completely paralysed the Georgian railways. Subsequently, on August 22, Russian forces began withdrawing from control posts, gradually reopening roads as they departed Kaspi. In the aftermath, the country embarked on extensive efforts to rebuild infrastructure, compensate citizens for their losses, and restore normalcy following the devastation wrought by the war.

(Top left) Building near the railway in Kaspi, which collapsed during the bombing and resulted in death of Mevlud Merebashvili, 67.

(Top right) Bombed cemetery in Samtavisi village

(Bottom left) Bombed bridge in Kaspi

(Bottom right) Destroyed railway on August 16



4) Interpretation: the display holds significant meaning in today's context, highlighting the impact of the Russo-Georgian War on the region's infrastructure, economy, and population. Reading the facts, an explanation to the causes of the war is missing. The focus is on the damage caused by Russians. It also shows the devastating cost of conflict.

3) Cultural Analysis: The displays functions as an educational tool, informing visitors about specific Russian military actions on the Kaspi region. It is rather factual, describing the historical events in chronological order.

2) Evaluation: Aesthetically, the panel has a professional layout. The plaque is in good condition and is the same size as most of the displays with text in the museum. There is informative text, coupled with exemplifying photographs.

1) Identification: The artefact serves as museum display. The title reads "The aftermath of the 2008 War" and provides a chronological account of the damage caused by Russian military actions.

Artefact: The display panel is rectangular, made of hard plastic, and screwed onto the wall. It contains text in Georgian, communicating the impact of the 2008 War on the Kaspi region. It also contains four images, all displaying the devastation that was caused by the Russians. The display was created between 2015-2016 for the museum in Kaspi. Who took the photographs is unclear.

Figure 5.9 Drawing in Ergneti Museum
Source: Author (08-02-2023)



4) Interpretation: The drawing shows how an artist views Russia: as an aggressor, threatening Georgia, possibly reflecting a sentiment shared amongst the Georgians. The colour red for the breakaway regions could signify conflict and bloodshed. Although the text is in English, the strong symbolism delivers a clear and accessible message, even without wording.

3) Cultural Analysis: The drawing functions as a piece of political commentary. It also informs visitors about the role Russia has in the conflict: the oppressor.

2) Evaluation: The drawing is made with pencil and uses symbolism, with the bear serving as a metaphor for Russia (and earlier for the Russian Empire and Soviet Union). It is not properly framed and, compared to the other artefacts, it is not as professional.

1) Identification: The artefact is a drawing, created by an unknown artist. Due to the somewhat childlike style and writing, it is possibly created by a young person.

Artefact: The artefact hangs in the museum in Ergneti, taped onto the brick wall. It depicts a bear, named Russia, that is clenching the map of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia coloured in red) between its teeth. It was displayed in the museum sometime between 2018 and 2023.

This section discussed the third and last sub-question: To what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences?

Overall, the findings reveal that the artefacts displayed in different Georgian museums exhibit both similarities and differences. The type of artefacts in all museums are very similar; they consist mainly of photographs, uniforms of soldiers, and bomb shells, with little to no explanatory text, mostly just titles. In Kaspi and Ergneti almost every reference is in Georgian, whereas, dissimilarly, in Gori the exhibition covering events before the 1990s is in Georgian and Russian. The 2008 exhibition in Gori includes references in only Georgian, with a few in English. The lack of informative text leaves much up for interpretation, allowing visitors to form their own understanding of the displays.

When analysing the themes of the artefacts, three similarities become evident, although not present in all case studies. The themes of Historical Analogies and emphasising the role of Russia as the Aggressor are observed in both Kaspi and Ergneti. Within the theme

of Russia as the Aggressor, there is a notable absence of discussion regarding the role of the separatists in the War. This silencing is consistent across the entire dataset. Dissimilarly, Historical Analogies and Russia as the Aggressor remain absent in Gori. A third theme, Personalised Victimisation with a strong focus on local casualties, is present in all three museums.

Chapter 6. Discussion

With the data presented in the previous chapter, the sub-questions have been answered. This chapter aims to further interpret these results to address the main research question: How is the Russo-Georgian War remembered in Georgian museums and why? This final interpretative phase is conducted within the theoretical framework of Formats of Memory and Critical Museology, aiming to provide a meaningful discussion.

Before proceeding with the interpretative phase, it is important to understand the key findings; the purpose of the museums, as addressed by the first sub-question, is primarily to preserve history and to educate the public. In Kaspi and Ergneti, this underlying motivation appears to be driven by anti-Russian sentiment, whereas the Gori Museum refrained from using anti-Russian rhetoric. Another possible underlying drive is to address the educational gap left by the state. In addition to educating, the museums collect, conserve, exhibit and engage with visitors via tours.

The considerations guiding the selection and presentation of artefacts, as addressed by the second sub-question, lie with several factors. First, financial constraints limit the ability of museums to obtain artefacts. This leads to the dependency of donations, which come largely from the local community. Second, a lack of a structured policy for artefact display, results in an incoherent, unclear approach displaying the selected artefacts. Third, in the cases of Kaspi and Ergneti, a desire to draw historical parallels becomes evident.

The answer to the third sub-question, to what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences, is multifaceted. Three themes arise when analysing the objects. The first theme is Personalised Victimisation, that has a strong focus on local casualties, and is present in all three museums. The second theme, present in Kaspi and Ergneti, is Historical Analogies. The third theme, Russia as the Aggressor, emphasises the role of Russia as the villain while silencing the role of the separatists in the 2008 War. This silencing is consistent across all museums. Dissimilarly, the two themes Historical Analogies and Russia as the Aggressor are notably absent in Gori.

6.1 Interpretation in relation to Memory Formats

This section interprets the key findings through the theoretical lens of Memory Formats.

When doing so, it becomes evident that individual memory plays a significant role in shaping and structuring the Museum in Ergneti.

Lia, born in 1952, embodies a living memory spanning Soviet Georgia, the USSR's dissolution, and the turbulent independence era of the 1990s. She has a deep connection to Tskhinvali, where she studied and worked before settling in Ergneti. However, it is her individual memory of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War specifically that influences her museum's narrative.

During the initial days of the 2008 War, Lia sheltered with her family in her own basement, before fleeing to Tbilisi. Upon her return, she was confronted with the aftermath of the August War: her village and possessions were destroyed and her home got riddled with bullets. The museum, located in her basement where the shells remain, underlines the personal nature of her memories.

Central to Lia's museum is her belief that Russian forces instigated the hate between separatists and Georgians. Her memories do not bear animosity towards Ossetians; instead, she remembers a time of unity. This perspective is reflected in her museum's exhibits, which notably silence references to separatists' role in the August War. For Lia, the conflict was instigated by an external force that disrupted the harmony that once existed. This perspective only partly aligns with David Darchiashvili's arguments, mentioned in earlier chapters. Darchiashvili acknowledges the long-standing local national projects of the separatists, while also recognising that Russia fuelled them. Lia does not speak about any desire amongst Abkhazians and South Ossetians for autonomy or independence. She entirely attributes the conflict to an external force: Russia.

Thus, Lia's museum exemplifies how individual memories shape collective understanding. Her museum serves not just as a repository of artefacts but as a testament to her lived experiences and her interpretation of history. This is reinforced by the fact that she is the only curator, which allows her to craft the exhibition without external influences.

In contrast, when comparing the role of individual memory at the Gori and Kaspi Museums, it is clear that individual memory plays a less of a role. In Gori, Daria curated the exhibition with input from colleagues and significant involvement from the local community, highlighting the broader impact of social memory. Similarly, in Kaspi, Nino established the museum with her students, who, unlike Lia, did not experience the 2008 War firsthand. Nino's connection to Kaspi through teaching does not equate to personal experience of conflict, and her students were not born yet in 2008. Thus, while individual memory dominates in Ergneti, social dynamics shape the narratives in Gori and Kaspi Museums to a greater extent.

When examining exhibitions, it becomes clear that social dynamics play a significant role across all three museums. In Ergneti, Kaspi, and Gori, local residents eagerly contributed

artefacts such as uniforms, medals, and photographs of those who died in the 2008 War. All villages were directly impacted by the Russo-Georgian War, and the locals share a social memory of the conflict. Thus, a collective desire to remember can be observed, and the museums provide a platform for social communities to collectively commemorate the War.

However, differences emerge in how these communities interpret their historical and social memories. In Gori, there is a strong affinity for Stalin and Soviet nostalgia among the local population. This sentiment contrasts sharply with Kaspi, where the museum critically examines the Soviet past, portraying it as an era of occupation that resulted in significant local casualties. Similarly, in Ergneti, situated near the demarcation line, residents are confronted with ongoing Russian presence, which restricts access to places like Tskhinvali, that many still have connections to.

These varying social memories are distinctly reflected in the museums' narratives. Gori avoids labelling Russia as an occupier and refrains from Historical Analogies, reflecting its neutral to positive view of the Soviet past. In contrast, both Kaspi and Ergneti openly acknowledge and discuss Russian occupation and its historical implications, aligning with their communities' critical views of Soviet and Russian influence.

One interesting aspect here is the role of generational memory within social memory. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, generational memory involves "members of a generation sharing a common framework of beliefs, values, and experiences shaped by significant historical events".²⁶⁰ While a generational shift typically occurs every 30 years, it's been 15 years since the 2008 War and the fieldwork research conducted for this thesis, meaning the groups who directly lived through and remember the War are still predominant, without a significant shift to the post-War generation.

However, as explored in the chapter on the History of Memory, a noticeable generational shift can be observed regarding perceptions of the Soviet past and attitudes towards Russia. Those before the Rose Revolution often hold less antagonistic views towards Russia compared to the post-revolution generation, which tends to view Russia more critically due to the conflicts and occupations in Georgia. This generational difference is evident in Kaspi, where students from the post-Rose Revolution era have grown up with narratives entirely blaming Russia for Georgia's conflicts, which is reflected in the museum that demonises Russia and the Soviet Union.

²⁶⁰ Aleida Assmann, 'Memory, Individual and Collective', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 214.

In contrast, Lia, who grew up during the Soviet Union and also demonises Russia, does not fit into this generational divide entirely. In line with the findings in the literature, it would be expected that she would not speak highly critical of Russia, but the opposite is observed. An explanation could be that her perspective may be influenced by her individual memories and the fact the village is confronted daily with the occupation, and therefore she is more critical of Moscow.

Furthermore, Assmann suggests that forms of commemoration often emerge around 15 years after an event. However, in stark contrast to Assmann's theory, the museums in Gori, Kaspi, and Ergneti were founded just a month, 8 years, and 9 years after the 2008 War, respectively. This deviation from Assmann's timeline can be partly explained by unique circumstances. The museum in Gori, established before the War and focused on displaying Georgia's historical wars, quickly updated its exhibits to include the 2008 War. For Kaspi and Ergneti, the relatively quick establishment of their museums likely reflects both individual and social desires to remember and commemorate the August War. Additionally, the Georgian Dream party's reluctance to remember the 2008 War, is not mirrored in broader society. In fact, the lack thereof, may have motivated individuals and communities to establish museums as a means to preserve and communicate their own narratives, which they feel are inadequately represented by official channels.

Regarding political memory, the museums in Kaspi and Ergneti, being privately owned, reflect individual and social narratives. In contrast, the museum in Gori is state-funded, but interview data and background information suggest that the state's involvement is limited to financial support, without an interest to influence the curatorial process. This aligns with literature on Georgia's political memory, indicating that the country is still in the process of defining its identity and lacks a cohesive policy on memory politics. Recently, the GD has shifted its approach to remembering the past and envisioning Georgia's future. Consequently, there is difficulty in establishing a unified narrative in museums, as officials are still determining how to present Georgia's history and seem disinterested in actively shaping historical representations.

The lack of a comprehensive policy on political memory allows privately owned museums like those in Kaspi and Ergneti to freely represent diverse perspectives and personal experiences of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. In contrast, Gori's state-funded museum may be more cautious in its portrayal of Russia as an absolute enemy. Despite adding the 2008 exhibition during the Saakashvili administration, the museum's approach is tempered by

differing official viewpoints within the state apparatus (coupled with the local Soviet nostalgia amongst the Gori population) potentially influencing its reluctance to condemn Russia.

When placing the empirical data in the last format, cultural memory, it is revealed that the museums in Kaspi, Ergneti, and Gori function as repositories of cultural memory, preserving artefacts that enable continuous reflection on the 2008 War. However, these museums exhibit varying degrees of alignment with Assmann's concept.

The Museum in Kaspi offers more explanatory text compared to Ergneti and Gori, with clear statements and pictures depicting Russia as the occupier and Georgia as the victim. This explicit narrative leaves less room for interpretation, aligning with a more directed and emotionally charged form of cultural memory. In Ergneti, while there is less text and more pictures, the references to Russia as the enemy are still explicit, leaving little doubt about the aggressor. The combination of personal stories and visual artefacts reinforces this narrative, although with slightly more room for personal interpretation than in Kaspi.

Conversely, the Gori Museum presents the War with almost no explanatory text and many pictures, providing a broader and less directed narrative. This approach offers much more room for visitor interpretation, allowing individuals to form their own conclusions about the 2008 War and its causes. This method aligns more closely with Assmann's idea of cultural memory as a space for diverse interpretations, where the lack of a strong guiding narrative allows for multiple reassessments and personal reflections on the past.

Overall, it is evident that the themes embedded in the curation process are navigated by Formats of Memory, which often overlap. The next section analyses the key findings in relation to Critical Museology to examine how post-colonial thought influences the curatorial processes.

6.2 Interpretation in relation to Critical Museology Theory

When examining the empirical data through the lens of Critical Museology Theory, the museums in Kaspi and Ergneti exemplify the principles of this theory by challenging historical narratives imposed by colonial and oppressive powers. In Kaspi, the museum's focus on Soviet repression and the 2008 War. Coupled with the founder's intention to educate youth and foreign visitors about Russia's ongoing threats, this museum exemplifies an effort to reshape historical narratives and promote a diverse perspective. This is similar to the Ergneti Museum, that also highlights the role of Russia as the long occupier.

Despite their critical stance, both the Kaspi and Ergneti Museums have room for improvement. The strong anti-Russian sentiment overshadows a more nuanced understanding of the conflict and its complexities. Additionally, Critical museology also emphasises the representation of minority groups, which is absent in the museums. The voices of Abkhazians and South Ossetians are not included in the exhibitions, while they could provide a more comprehensive and balanced narrative. Currently, this aspect is missing, limiting the museums' ability to fully embrace the principles of Critical Museology.

In contrast, the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori faces significant challenges in breaking away from the Old Museology. Founded during Soviet times, when Georgia was still a colony, the museum has deep-rooted ties to the narratives and power structures of its colonial past. This historical context makes it more difficult for the Gori Museum to fully engage with Critical Museology principles, which advocate for a more inclusive and diverse representation of history.

Furthermore, there is a notable lack of "indigenisation of the museum." The culture of display does not include a process whereby indigenous peoples take control over the representation of their cultures and histories in museums. The Gori Museum continues to display Soviet symbols without explaining their presence or historical significance. These symbols appear to be hanging as décor, almost as a celebration of the colonial past, rather than being contextualised or critiqued.

However, small changes indicate a potential shift. The older exhibitions, created during the USSR, remain unchanged and are presented in both Georgian and Russian. The exhibition on the wars of the 1990s, created after decolonisation, is entirely in Georgian, and the 2008 exhibition includes texts in both Georgian and English. This gradual move away from the language of the coloniser could represent a small but significant step towards adopting Critical Museology principles. It signifies an effort to move away from the colonialist narrative that still pervades the museum, indicating a potential transition towards a more inclusive and reflective representation of Georgian history.

6.3 Answering the Research Question

This section aims to answer the main research question: How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why? The three sub-questions provided clarity on the "how" aspect, while the interpretation in relation to the theoretical frameworks gave

more insights into the "why". As discussed in the literature review, an exhibition is a showing or display of artefacts meant to communicate with an audience. What is being communicated, is the storyline, curational voice, or master narrative of the exhibition. This master narrative is essentially how the museum remembers: what do they communicate with their artefacts to the audience? In conclusion, the overall answer to the main research question is multifaceted and revolves around three main themes, each conveying a certain narrative. This section addresses each "how", and then explores the corresponding "why".

The first theme, consistent across all museums, is Personalised Victimisation. This narrative focuses on local soldiers from Ergneti, Kaspi and Gori that died during the 2008 War. This narrative is evident in the displays of uniforms and pictures of soldiers from the Ergneti, Kaspi and Gori regions who died during the 2008 War. The reason why all museums convey this narrative, can be explained by the drive from individual and social memories to remember what happened to them and members of their group and pass this memory on to the next generation, building their own imagined communities.

Passing on memories is also evident when looking at the second theme: Historical Analogies. This narrative, present in Kaspi and Ergneti, draws parallels between the 2008 conflict and both earlier occupations by Russia – such as those following the Treaty of Georgievsk and the 1921 Soviet Occupation – as well as present occupations in different regions, like as Ukraine. The reasoning behind drawing parallels, lies with the museums' desire to reinforce a national identity and create a sense of unity across generations that have all battled the same external threat, thereby creating a collective national consciousness. The museums emphasise Georgia's ongoing struggle for sovereignty and resistance against external aggression.

The third theme in which both the museums in Kaspi and Ergneti remember the 2008 War, is by highlighting the role of Russia as the Aggressor. Despite Russia's significant role in the 2008 War, during which it attacked villages and cities even beyond the breakaway regions, this narrative emphasises Moscow's role while silencing or forgetting the roles of separatists and Georgians themselves in the conflict. All museums leave out informative texts on the causes of the 2008 War. Why this narrative is present, is explained by a need to protect a positive self-image. This is an overarching reason, present in all three themes. As explained in the theoretical framework, national memory tends to commemorate defeats only when the identity is built on victimhood. Assmann argues that traumatic experiences and moments of shame and guilt are excluded to protect a positive self-image. This need to protect the self-image is clearly not just a phenomenon in political memory and national memory, it is also

present in individual and social memories. By placing all the blame on Russia, the aggressor, Georgia exonerates itself from playing a role in the 2008 War and silences the role of the separatists. However, to truly overcome history, Georgia must discuss the past and properly address it, rather than forget and silence parts of it.

Conclusion

Despite its significance in Georgia's recent history, the Russo-Georgian War remains an understudied topic within the field of Memory Studies in Anglophone academic literature. This is especially evident when compared to the extensive research on the Russo-Georgian War from an International Relations perspective, and Memory Studies regarding Georgia's Soviet past, as evidenced in the introduction. However, considering the War's significant role in shaping the contemporary Georgian socio-political environment and identity, the omission is puzzling. Therefore, this thesis aimed to address the gap in Memory Studies related to the Russo-Georgian War by analysing museums in Georgia and contributing to the literature in this area.

Through the theoretical paradigms of Memory Formats and Critical Museology, this research has explored three case studies: the Museum of Occupation in Kaspi, the 2008 War Museum in Ergneti (both privately-funded), and the Museum of Battle Glory in Gori (state-funded). Using a methodological approach that combines Thematic Analysis to analyse interviews conducted with museum staff, and the Winterthur Model to analyse museum artefacts, this thesis answered the following research questions:

Main research question: How is the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 remembered in Georgian museums and why?

Sub-questions:

- (1) Why were the museums established, what is their purpose?
- (2) What considerations guide the selection and presentation of the artefacts in Georgian museums?
- (3) To what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences?

Before proceeding to the overall conclusion, the key findings related to the three sub-questions are discussed. The study found that the main purpose of these museums, addressing the first sub-question, is to preserve history and educate visitors. In addition, they participate in collecting, conserving, exhibiting and engaging with visitors via tours. However, a significant difference was observed in underlying reasons to educate: the museums in Kaspi

and Ergneti also articulated their aim to inform visitors about the negative role of Russia historically and presently, whereas the museum in Gori refrained from such statements. Furthermore, the study suggested a second possible underlying drive, which is to address the educational gap left by the state.

The research addressing the considerations guiding the selection and presentation of artefacts, as explored in the second sub-question, revealed several similarities amongst the case studies: (1) financial constraints, limiting the ability of museums to collect artefacts. This leads to the dependency of donations, which are primarily coming from the local community. (2) A lack of a structured professional policy for artefact display, resulting in an incoherent, unclear approach displaying the selected artefacts. (3) In the cases of Kaspi and Ergneti, the selection is also guided by a desire to draw historical parallels. This indicates that certain artefacts are selected and displayed to highlight the long-standing struggle against Russian occupation, not only in Georgia's past and present, but also in other regions such as Ukraine.

The answer to the third sub-question, to what extent do the displayed artefacts in Georgian museums exhibit similarities or differences, is multilayered. The findings regarding the types of artefacts showed similarities amongst the three case studies; the artefacts consist mainly of photographs, uniforms of soldiers, and bomb shells, with little to no explanatory text, mostly just titles. This lack of informative text leaves much up for interpretation, allowing visitors to form their own understanding of the displays.

When analysing the themes of the objects, three similarities became evident, although not present in all museums. The first theme is Personalised Victimisation, that has a strong focus on local casualties, and is present in all three museums. The second theme, present in the privately-funded museums in Kaspi and Ergneti, is Historical Analogies. Within this theme, a narrative is conveyed that draws historical parallels between the 2008 War and earlier Russian Occupations, such as the 1921 Soviet Occupation and the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk. The third theme, Russia as the Aggressor, emphasises the role of Russia as the villain while silencing the role of the separatists in the 2008 War. This silencing is consistent across all museums. Dissimilarly, Historical Analogies and Russia as the Aggressor remain absent in Gori.

The abovementioned observations, coupled with the theoretical frames of Formats of Memory and Critical Museology, lead to the conclusion that the answer to the main research question is multifaceted. This section discusses the overall conclusion in more detail.

How the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 is remembered in Georgian museums and why, revolves around three key themes: Personalised Victimisation, Historical Analogies, and highlighting the role of Russia as the Aggressor. The first theme, Personalised Victimisation, is driven by the need to remember and pass on individual and collective experiences to future generations. The second theme, Historical Analogies, create a sense of unity across generations that have faced similar external threats, reinforcing a collective national identity and consciousness that is still in the making. The last theme, highlighting Russia as the Aggressor, though historically accurate, is also driven by the need to protect a positive self-image, exonerating Georgia from its role in the 2008 War and silencing the role of the separatists. Silencing and forgetting parts of history restricts Georgia from dealing with the past and prevents reconciliation. Notably, only the first theme is present in all three museums, while the second and third themes are only present in the privately-funded museums and not the state-funded museum.

Moreover, financial constraints and a lack of professional display policies also influence how the war is remembered, leading to somewhat fragmented and unnuanced exhibitions. The privately-funded museums in Kaspi and Ergneti, for example, partly exemplify the principles of Critical Museology by challenging historical narratives imposed by colonial and oppressive powers, but their strong anti-Russian sentiment overshadows a more nuanced understanding of the conflict.

The state-funded Museum of Battle Glory in Gori faces much more significant challenges in breaking away from Old Museology. Founded during Soviet times, the museum has deep-rooted ties to colonial narratives and power structures. However, there are small changes indicating a potential shift, such as displaying texts in Georgian and English, rather than in Russian. This gradual move away from the language of the coloniser could signify an effort to modernise and shift towards a more inclusive and reflective representation of Georgian history.

The key findings and the overall conclusion indicate that there is a divergence between privately-funded and state-funded museums. In line with the literature on the nation-building by the state during Saakashvili, the themes of Historical Analogies and emphasising Russia as the Aggressor are evident. However, these themes are present only in the privately-funded museums in Kaspi and Ergneti, not in the state-funded museum in Gori. Only the theme of Personalised Victimisation is present in all three museums. This indicates that the privately-

funded museums, which emerged from grassroots initiatives, reflect a societal desire to remember the 2008 war through museums, whereby Russia is demonised. In contrast, the state-funded museum refrains from such rhetoric. Notably, not one of the key-elements of Georgian Dream's recent nation-building are present in the case studies. There are no references to "Georgian traditional values", the Georgian Orthodox Church, anti-Western sentiment, or the demonisation of Saakashvili or NGOs. This suggests that the museums do not align with the Georgian Dream's recent shift towards populist nationalism, where Bidzina Ivanishvili is looking West but acting East.

The divergence between privately-funded and state-funded museums highlights a broader societal-political contrast in Georgia, which became especially evident since the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine: The Georgian society largely supports Ukraine and condemns Russia, whereas the ruling Georgian Dream party has avoided joining sanctions and has shifted from a policy of normalisation with Russia towards a more pro-Russian orientation. Moreover, the existence of several grassroots initiatives to commemorate the war through museums, contrasted with the Georgian Dream's minimal efforts in this area, shows a strong societal desire to remember the conflict. A desire which is not shared by the officials, indicating a lack of interest or willingness to engage in the politics of memory. Therefore, Georgian individuals and societies haven't taken it upon themselves to remember the tragedy of Russian Occupation.

When analysing the study and its findings, several limitations became evident. Firstly, the data regarding the curatorial processes and decisions behind the exhibitions is not very detailed. This includes the criteria for selecting specific artifacts and narratives, which could provide a deeper understanding of the representational strategies employed by the museums. However, it is noteworthy that the staff members across all three museums did not provide in-depth answers regarding their rationale behind these decisions. This lack of detailed responses itself is indicative of underlying issues: financial constraints coupled with a lack of professionalism contribute to a lack of thorough reasoning behind the curatorial choices.

Secondly, the data sample is quite small, being limited to only three specific museums. Consequently, the findings may not capture the full spectrum of how the Russo-Georgian War is represented across all Georgian museums, restricting the ability to generalise these findings to other museums within Georgia. The unique characteristics and individual curatorial decisions of these three museums may not reflect broader trends.

Despite the limitations, this study still provides valuable insights into how museums remember the 2008 War, offering a starting point for further research. One of the key contributions of this thesis is the identification of three central themes in the museums' representations of the Russo-Georgian War: Personalised Victimisation, Historical Analogies, and highlighting Russia as the Aggressor. These themes shed light on specific ways in which the August War is remembered and offer insights into broader societal and political dynamics in Georgia. Moreover, this study is the first of its kind, paving the way for future research to build upon the findings and broaden the understanding of the representation of the Russo-Georgian War, not only in Georgian museums but also in various forms of commemoration such as remembrance days, movies, memorials, and monuments.

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Appendix A. Anti-Russian Sentiment in Tbilisi



Figure 1. Graffiti in Tbilisi telling Russians to go back to Russia. Source: Author (September 2022)



Figure 2. Ukrainian Flag alongside a Georgian Flag in Tbilisi. Source: Author (September 2022).



Figure 3. Poster in Tbilisi saying "Ukraine is Georgia, Georgia is Ukraine". Source: Author (September 2022)



Figure 4. Graffiti in Tbilisi saying "Fuck Russia" alongside a Ukrainian Flag. Source: Author (September 2022)



Figure 5. Graffiti in Tbilisi saying "Fuck Putin". Source: Author (September 2022)

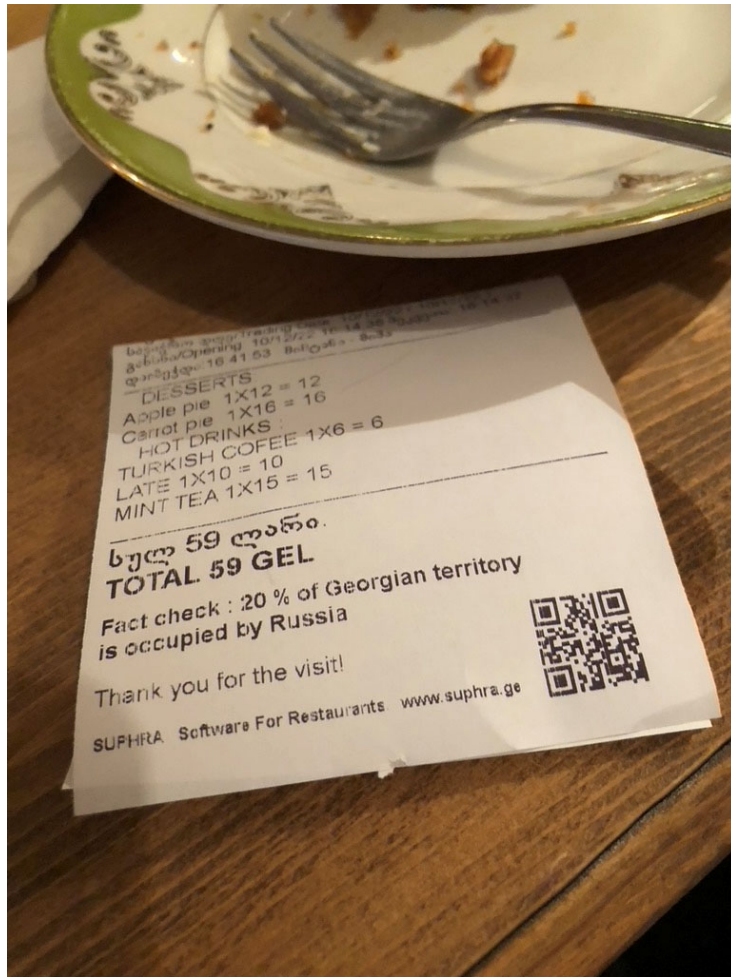


Figure 6. Receipt in a Restaurant in Tbilisi, stating "Fact check: 20% of Georgian territory is occupied by Russia". Source: Author (December 2022)

Appendix B. Interview Questions

Questions about the participant

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (age, where are you from, job occupation)?
- What is your function at this museum? What are your main tasks?

General questions about the museum

- When was the museum established? Is there a reason for this date?
- Where does the funding come from? (Has the funding changed?)
- Is the museum private-owned or state-owned?
- What can you tell us about the location and the building of the museum? Why is it located here?

Questions about the 2008 war exhibition

- Who was involved in creating the exhibition? Did you participate in creating this exhibition (if yes – what was your role?)
- Why was this exhibition created? What is the purpose of the exhibition? What is the narrative that the exhibition aims to carry out?
- What was the process of selection for the objects? How and why did you collect these objects?
- Which audience are you trying to reach and why?
- What is the reason behind the language selection?
- What challenges did you face during the creation of the exhibition?
- What are the future plans for the exhibition?
- Are there things you would like to change to the exhibition? Is anything still missing?