

# REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE EXHIBITIONS DEDICATED TO THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR: THE LATE SOCIALIST PERIOD IN GEORGIA

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The paper was prepared within the framework of “World War II and Women”  
a small grant project by Heinrich Boell Foundation, Tbilisi Office

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and  
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*In memory of my beloved grandmother, Dodo Bukia*

**Acknowledgements:** A special thanks goes to Mrs. Daria Vashagashvili for opening the museum doors for me, which were closed due to COVID-19 pandemic, and for all the important information she shared with me along with her valuable opinions. I would also like to thank her for sharing the exhibition booklet and the thematic lecture of the exhibition with me.

Additionally, I would like to extend a warm thankyou to my supervisor Tamta Melashvili, for reading the text attentively and providing comments and feedback, as well as Lilia Chikhladze for her comments and input.

I am also grateful to Heinrich Boell Foundation Tbilisi Office for supporting this project financially.

And finally, I would like to thank my precious friend Ana Gvalia, for her invaluable support, encouragement, and her enormous help in searching for and collecting the research material for this project and for the time she set aside to revise the text. Without her, this paper would not have seen the light of day!

#### **Cover Photo**

“Pupils in the Museum of People’s Friendship, at the Display Stand on Women, with the guide D.G. Jintcharadze” photo was taken in Tbilisi, 1976; Photographer unknown; Photo film kept in the Photo-Phono-Video Collections of Georgian National Museum.

## ABSTRACT:

The following article analyzes the forms and the content of women's representation in the exhibitions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War in the late 60's and the early 80's using the example of the exhibition dedicated to Great Patriotic War at the Museum of People's Friendship and the Permanent Exhibition of Gori and Gori district Museum of Battle Glory. Throughout the research the literature on these museums, the photo album, thematic lecture, and the available visual sources were analyzed. As a result, the ambivalent forms of expressing masculinity and femininity of Soviet and National, as well as the following central topoi were identified: **Women's involvement in war was a force majeure event; women fight bravely like men and together with men;** Georgian mother in the exhibition represents a mainstay of ethnic culture, while father is a historical actor.

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# INTRODUCTION

During WWII, one million Soviet women fought<sup>1</sup> and held various positions in the Red Army.<sup>2</sup> By 1945, there were 22.3 million women serving on the home front “working in industry and agriculture.”<sup>3</sup> This kind of women’s participation was unseen among other warring nations<sup>4</sup> at the time. However, despite the main promise of the Great Patriotic War Cult – *No one is Forgotten, Nothing is Forgotten*<sup>5</sup> – women were given pre-defined roles in the post-war collective memory: that of a mother, a partisan, nurse, etc., with different variations, all of which will be discussed in this paper by looking at the examples of Georgian exhibitions. Namely, the People’s Friendship Museum Great Patriotic War exhibition of the 1970’s and the first half of the 1980’s together with the exhibition of the Museum of Battle Glory of the town of Gori and the Gori District of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in the late 1960’s and early 1980’s.

Victory in the Great Patriotic War became a foundational myth<sup>6</sup> of the Soviet Union next to the October Revolution. Nina Tumarkin brings an example of the transfer of the sacred fire from the Field of Mars in Leningrad to the Grave of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow in 1967<sup>7</sup> as an act of “symbolic incorporation of the Great Patriotic War into the Soviet Union’s foundational saga.”<sup>8</sup> Already, from the period of de-Stalinization, the quest for new ideals and mythos across the Soviet Union was underway.<sup>9</sup> The denunciation of the Cult of Personality by Nikita Khrushchev in his famous Secret Speech given in February 1956 at the XX Communist Party Congress<sup>10</sup> triggered diverse and contrasting reactions

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1 Including the partisans.

2 Roger D. Markwick; *The Motherland Calls; Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945*; Melanie Ilic (ed.) in: *Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*; Palgrave Macmillan; 2018; Chapter 15; p. 224.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid*; p. 217.

5 Nina Tumarkin; *The Living and the Dead; The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*; Basic Books; 1994; p. 14.

6 The Notion of *Myth* does not imply here that the victory of the Soviet Union in the Second World War is a fiction, a construction. It is rather applied in the context of the Cult of the Great Patriotic War. Thomas Sherlock defines the meaning of a foundational myth as follows: “Foundation myths are usually dramatic stories that describe how and for what purposes an idealized leader or leaders created the existing political system” cited in: Thomas Sherlock; *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia, Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future*; Palgrave Macmillan; 2007; p.8.

7 Tumarkin; p. 128.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Claire E. McCallum; *The Fate of the New Man; Representing and Reconstructing Masculinity in Soviet Visual Culture; 1945-1965*; NIU Press; DeKalb, IL; Northern Illinois University Press; 2018; p. 118.

10 Melanie Ilic, Jeremy Smith(eds.); *State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*; Introduction by Melanie Ilic; Routledge; London and New York; 2009; p. 1.

among party activists as well within the general population.<sup>11</sup> The processes unleashed because of the opening of the Pandora Box conditioned in one way or another the future symbolic discourses beyond the immediate timeframe. The loss of the father of Soviet nations<sup>12</sup> necessitated the introduction of new universal categories in the collective memory in order to legitimize the post-Stalinist system. However, the trajectory of this reassessment was not unidirectional, and one can observe this on the example of visual culture as well. Unlike in art, father during the Thaw period was present in Soviet cinema by his “absence.”<sup>13</sup> This trend according to Aleksandr Prokhorov, can be explained as an attempt to free the generation of father heroes from the shackles of unpleasant associations with Stalinist crimes.<sup>14</sup> Generally speaking, the Georgian context of de-Stalinization differed in that the March 1956 protests spontaneously mobilized people to defend the very memory and dignity of Stalin.<sup>15</sup>

Although during the Brezhnev period (also known as the ‘Stagnation Era’) there were attempts to revive the Cult of Personality, the incentives coming from the party to “idealize society once again”<sup>16</sup> were met by many with “a mixture of hypocrisy and cynicism.”<sup>17</sup> In that regard, it is interesting what symbolic meanings were ascribed to women by the Soviet regime in this generally complex and elusive value system of the post-Stalinist era.

When discussing the notion of collective memory, it needs to be underlined that even within totalitarian systems, it is highly unlikely that collective memory is a monolith; fabricated and orchestrated only from the top down. It is rather a fluid container of shared meanings which the members belonging to a given society borrow from time to time to make sense of various events, in order to interpret them.<sup>18</sup>

Relying on Maurice Halbwachs, Aby Warburg and Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann explains the differences between communicative memory and cultur-

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11 Polly Jones; *From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization* cited in: Polly Jones (ed.); *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization; Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev Era*; Routledge, London and New York; 2006; pp. 42-48.

12 McCallum; p. 118.

13 *Ibid*; p. 134.

14 Prokhorov, *The Myth of the „Great Family“*; 30; cited in: McCallum, 2018; p. 134.

15 Foreword by Nino Lejava for the Georgian version of the publication by Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov, Lasha Bakradze; Thomas de Waal (ed.); *The Stalin Puzzle, Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion*; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office, 2013; p. 7. Available at: [https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/stalin\\_puzzle\\_176x250mm\\_corrected.pdf](https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/stalin_puzzle_176x250mm_corrected.pdf); last accessed on 09.12.2020.

16 Lynne Attwood (ed.) with Maya Turovskaya, Oksana Bulgakova, Elena Stishova, Dilyara Tasbulatova, Marina Drozdova and Maria Vizitei; *Red Women on the Silver Screen, Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*; Pandora Press, 1993; Part 1 by Lynn Attwood; *Women, Cinema and Society; Leonid Brezhnev: ‘The Era of Stagnation’*; p. 78

17 *Ibid*.

18 Seminar by Oksana Sarkisova on *Historical Narratives and the Moving Image*, Theory and Practice; Spring semester; Central European University, Budapest, 2018 cited in: Ana Lolua; *A True face of a Soviet Dictator; Representation of Stalin and his Legacy in Contemporary Georgia*; MA thesis; Central European University; Nationalism Studies Program; Budapest, 2020; p. 8.

al memory.<sup>19</sup> Communicative memory refers to the practice of transmission in which the eyewitnesses of the past event pass their memories onto their family members and acquaintances. Therefore, communicative memory is limited in time. Cultural memory on the other hand, is objectified in memorials, archives, libraries and museums, where it is translated and further institutionalized.<sup>20</sup> Even if meanings change and recontextualize, cultural memory is more stable, and its existence always transcends the life span of a single or even several generations.<sup>21</sup> It is important for the following study to distinguish between these different levels of memory, since as mentioned above, it focuses on how the memory of the Great Patriotic War was staged and reproduced in museums and exhibition practices.

Museums, along with their special iconography, can be compared with religious sites, while visits to the museum can be paralleled with religious rituals,<sup>22</sup> and with the experience of collective pilgrimage or individual catharsis.<sup>23</sup> In order to mediate their ideology, museums employ various classification strategies, categorizing objects as historical, ethnological, as objects of art, etc. and opt for a specific storytelling language once the artefacts are given designated spaces.<sup>24</sup> Each photo, painting, object, curatorial text or, on a more abstract level, the sound, colors, and smell, are in a narrational relationship vis-à-vis one another. The story told to the visitor, or, in other words – the exhibition narrative – presents the viewer with one or several “versions of truth,”<sup>25</sup> usually in conformity with the values shared in the present by the actors or groups of actors<sup>26</sup> conveying that story. Moreover, “representation is a political act”<sup>27</sup> at least because it always involves the choice between remembering and forgetting and it dictates to us how to remember a person or group of people.

19 Jan Assmann; *Communicative and Cultural Memory*; originally published in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nuenning (Hg.) *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, New York 2008; pp. 109-110; available at: [https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/1774/1/Assmann\\_Communicative\\_and\\_cultural\\_memory\\_2008.pdf](https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/1774/1/Assmann_Communicative_and_cultural_memory_2008.pdf) ; last accessed on: 25.11.2020.

20 A. Assmann cited in: Jan Assmann; p. 111.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach; *The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis*; *Marxist Perspectives*, 4; 1978; pp. 28-30.

23 *Ibid.*; pp. 28-46.

24 Ruth B. Phillips; *How Museums Marginalize, Naming the Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion*; pp. 95-96 in: *Museum Pieces, Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*; McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011 (Reprinted 2012).

25 Abashin 2010; Anderson 1991; Duncan 1991; Horne 1984 as cited in: Katrine Bendtsen Gotfredsen; *Evasive Politics, Paradoxes of History, Nation, and Everyday Communication in the Republic of Georgia*; PhD Dissertation; Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen; Department of Anthropology; April 2013; p. 73; further cited in: Ana Lolua; *A True Face of a Soviet Dictator; Representation of Stalin and his Legacy in Contemporary Georgia*; MA thesis; Central European University; Nationalism Studies Program; Budapest, 2020; p. 9.

26 Hannes Heer, *The Head of Medusa: The Controversy Surrounding the Exhibition 'War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941 to 1944'* in: Hannes Heer; Walter Manoschek, Alexander Pollak and Ruth Wodak (eds.); *The Discursive Construction of History: Remembering Wehrmacht's War of Annihilation* Palgrave Macmillan; 2008; p. 233 cited in: Ana Lolua; *A True Face of a Soviet Dictator; Representation of Stalin and his Legacy in Contemporary Georgia*; MA thesis; Central European University; Nationalism Studies Program; Budapest, 2020; p.9.

27 Ames (1991:13) as cited in: Katrine Bendtsen Gotfredsen; *Evasive Politics, Paradoxes of History, Nation, and Everyday Communication in the Republic of Georgia*; PhD Dissertation; Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen; Department of Anthropology; April 2013; p. 73.

The mission of Soviet women at the beginning of the war was to contribute to the war effort from the home front. Employed in industry and collective agriculture, and struggling under the burden of domestic and public labor, they were forced to fulfill the excessive production norms.<sup>28</sup> Already, beginning in 1942, young women were openly being mobilized into the Red Army<sup>29</sup> *en masse*. Afterwards however, they were again *en masse* demobilized,<sup>30</sup> and were disappeared in the family and other rather invisible spheres of public life.<sup>31</sup>

Locking women up in specific categories can be interpreted as a commentary on their involvement in war, which had to be perceived only as a temporary measure dictated by a state of emergency. It seems like the biographies of women soldiers reach the pinnacle of their human abilities – one could even say *supernatural abilities* – in a field traditionally defined as masculine. Thanks to the vigorous efforts and management of the Communist Party, women are ready to join the army, but their fate after the war ends in a less interesting way. Women often play the role of connecting the thread between Soviet and national motives in these exhibitions. Additionally, in their role as mothers they are mostly represented as stable symbols of selfless love beyond the historical domain and relegated to ethnic culture. They are deprived of taking an active part in history in the making as agents acting in time.<sup>32</sup> On the example of Soviet memorials, Mikhail Yampolsky suggests that socialist utopia is devoid of chronological time; that its time is rather totalizing and eternal.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the claim that only women representations are static as well as the generalization that in a socialist context any visual representation in any medium is *ahistorical*, would be problematic. It is rather argued in this paper that male heroes are at the center of the progressive narrative that the discussed exhibitions present.

In the museum, the history of the working woman is also written from the male point of view. The woman replaces her husband, her brother, or father in the industry: “Women, do replace your husbands at the lathe machines.”<sup>34</sup> It also merits mention that the Soviet State placed a particular emphasis on

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28 R.D. Markwick; p. 217; pp. 220-221.

29 *Ibid*; p. 224.

30 *Ibid*; p. 226.

31 *Ibid*; p. 229.

32 Even though the context here is quite different, this idea of naming the spaces as spaces of folk culture on the one hand and of history on the other hand, (in other words, spaces of ethnology and of history) in the present analysis is inspired by the arguments of a Canadian historian and curator, Ruth B. Phillips. She posits that in line with the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial ideologies and traditions the objects of the colonized in western museums are classified as ethnological objects and occupy the ethnological domains, while the material past of the colonizing west are accredited to the domain of history; Moreover, Phillips links the “colonial attitudes about race,” “Patriarchal ideas about gender” and “elitist notions about class”; cited in: Ruth B. Phillips; *How Museums Marginalize, Naming the Domains of Inclusion and Exclusion*; pp. 95-101 in: *Museum Pieces, Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums*; McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011 (Reprinted 2012).

33 Mikhail Yampolsky; *In the Shadow of Monuments, Notes on Iconoclasm and Time*; Translated by John Kachur in: *Soviet Hieroglyphics, Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*; Nancy Condee (ed.); Indiana University Press; BFI Publishing; London, 1995; pp. 98-99; p. 104.

34 Spartak Rekhviashvili; *The Hearth of the International Upbringing and Brotherhood*; „Ganatileba” Printing Press; Tbilisi, 1984; სპარტაკ რეხვიაშვილი; *ინტერნაციონალური აღზრდისა და ძმობის კერა; გამომცემლობა „განათლება“*, თბილისი; 1984; p. 32.

endorsing this link between home front and the actual frontline Union-wide in times of war already for obvious reasons.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that in the publication dedicated to the Great Patriotic War exhibition at the Museum of People's Friendship, women's role in aviation is specifically described as an unprecedented and salutary act of admitting women in this civilizational domain of technological progress, (the specific names of women are also mentioned e.g. the text talks about women aviators, the hero of the Soviet Union Maguba Sirtlanova<sup>36</sup> and about Rusudan Jordania and her "brave deeds"<sup>37</sup>), jobs in the aviation, communications and transport sector were regarded as more or less suitable for women during the war as they rely more on technical skills rather than the physical strength that is so crucial on the frontline.<sup>38</sup> Broadly speaking, such representations are still in line with the rhetoric of Khrushchev claiming that unlike in Tsarist Russia and in the states of the capitalist camp, women in the Soviet Union achieved their full equality with men in all spheres of public life.<sup>39</sup>

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35 R.D. Marckwick; p. 220

36 Rekhviashvili; p. 138.

37 *Ibid*; p. 33.

38 Carmen Scheide; *Unstintingly Master Warfare: Women in the Red Army*; Chapter 16; p.236 in: Melanie Ilic (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*"; Palgrave Macmillan; 2018; Marwick; p. 225.

39 Melanie Ilic; *What did Women Want; Khrushchev and the Revival of the Zhensovetiy* cited in: Melanie Ilic, Jeremy Smith(eds.); *State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*; Routledge; London and New York, 2009; pp. 105-106.

# METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The Gori and Gori District Museum of Battle Glory opened in 1968, and the exhibition was profoundly recast in 1975 on the occasion of 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Patriotic War Victory. During this period, the museum initially opened on a public initiative now became the state funded institution and joined the Stalin Museum as its branch museum. Since then, the exhibition was modified in its form and structure several times, but the main concept and the core of the exhibits - at least the visual material on display – has remained essentially the same.<sup>40</sup> This allows us to look at the images of women, the function of these images and trace some of the general traits of women's visual representation in the exhibition space when access to the archives is limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A thematic lecture, newspaper articles and brochures were also used in dialogue with the main trends found in other mediums of cultural memory. Additionally, it was possible to hold a conversation with the Museum Director Mrs. Daria Vashagashvili.

The Museum of People's Friendship and therefore, the exhibition of 1975 discussed in this paper, no longer exists. The Museum collections including the photo material on the exhibition are mostly kept at the archives of the Georgian National Museum, since the Museum of People's Friendship was initially created on the basis of the Simon Janashia State Museum, which is now part of the National Museum. It was not possible to work on this visual material due to the pandemic regulations that were in place, and this poses an important limitation in terms of looking at how the space was structurally organized, how the exhibits related to one another, as well as a more detailed analysis of specific objects present in the exhibition space and those that are missing. The Communist Party Archives were not accessible either, which made it difficult to identify some of the important actors behind the exhibitions. At the same time, it needs to be taken into the account that the publications by Otar Keinishvili (1981) and Spartak Rekhviashvili (1984) describing the exhibition in many details were created in the early 1980s, sometime after the initial exhibition was launched. Nothing is explicitly stated in them regarding any major transformation of the general concept or on the structural changes affected. However, one cannot resolutely claim that the entire exhibition did not change at all during these 6 to 10 years. Therefore, to avoid fragmented conclusions, a diachronic analysis should be carried out in the future. Based on a more comprehensive study of archival and oral sources, the following study certainly needs to be revised and complemented.

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40 Interview with Daria Vashagashvili held in Gori, 01.11.2020.

If one considers at all the possibility of approaching the exhibitions as coherent texts, it must be highlighted that visual sources are still different from textual sources. On the other hand, the available descriptions of the exhibition together with the available photo albums, give valuable hints and make it possible to track the central topoi in women's representation in late Soviet and national narratives that these Great Patriotic War-related exhibitions try to transmit. Additionally, the descriptions are further interpretations and not the original exhibition commentary. In order to explain how the material on display and the respective labels were recontextualized and translated into new texts, it will be necessary to capture the purpose behind these texts and obtain some additional information on their authors in the future.

The proposed analysis uses the second half of the 1960's as its starting point because this is the period when the Cult of the Great Patriotic War begins to crystalize.<sup>41</sup> The reluctance of the regime in the immediate aftermath of the war in that regard can be explained by the fear that critical voices may emerge in a society devastated by war. Nina Tumarkin even traces the first instances of de-Stalinization during the Second World War and posits that the chaos and panic generated by the attack of Nazi Germany already created space for individual agency.<sup>42</sup>

Harking back to the tradition of the official victory celebrations, the 9<sup>th</sup> of May - again after 1946 and 1947- became a public holiday in 1965. Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kiev, Stalingrad, and others were also granted "hero city" status during this time. This period also witnessed an explosion in the number of memorial complexes dedicated to the war.<sup>43</sup>

The method of historical discourse analysis was applied<sup>44</sup> to work with the collected material. The following discursive topoi of women representations in the late socialist exhibitions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War were identified: **Women's involvement in war was a force majeure event; women fight bravely like men and shoulder to shoulder with men.** Georgian mother in the exhibition represents a mainstay of ethnic culture, while father is a historical actor. Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak define topoi as some kind of "conclusion rules"<sup>45</sup>, as justifications leading to the argumentation.<sup>46</sup>

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41 R.D Marwick; p. 226.

42 Tumarkin; pp. 64-65.

43 Ekaterina Makhotina; *Erinnerungen an den Krieg – Krieg der Erinnerungen. Litauen und der Zweite Weltkrieg*; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co; Goettingen, 2017; p.111.

44 Hannes Heer; Walter Manoschek, Alexander Pollak and Ruth Wodak (eds.) *The Discursive Construction of History: Remembering Wehrmacht's War of Annihilation* Palgrave Macmillan; 2008.

45 Reisigl and Wodak (2001) cited in: Ruth Wodak; *The Semiotics of Racism – A Critical Discourse Historical Analysis*; Lancaster University; 2009; p. 9.

46 *Ibid.*

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Concepts from war-related vocabulary were actively circulated by Soviet propaganda before and after the war as well. In the Stalinist context, the victory of the Socialist Revolution required martyrdom from Soviet masses. In order to be reborn as a “new human,” a Soviet hero was expected to self-sacrifice and to demonstrate unconditional loyalty to the party.<sup>47</sup>

The Museums of Local Lore (*Краеведческий музей*) across the Soviet Union, for example, tell the story of how each region contributed to the greater Soviet cause of modernization, be it through the exploitation of natural resources or via agricultural, industrial, scientific or cultural achievements.

In the Great Patriotic War, each state had to lay its share of devotion at the common sacrificial altar. However, war was a different experience for each.

Georgian territory was far from the actual war theater, so it seems quite logical that accent in the representation of the Victory Myth was also placed on the labor front and the rear in general: “Every Soviet nation, every Soviet patriot citizen, whether fighting on the battle field, or working in the rear, was contributing to this great victory. Therefore, the staff of the Museum of People’s Friendship lent plenty of space to the depiction of our toil in the rear.”<sup>48</sup> Special attention was granted to families as important agents in linking the war front with the front rear. “The unanimity of Soviet families fused the front and the back as a single force.”<sup>49</sup>

Looking at the history of the commemoration of WWII in the example of Lithuania in the 1960s, we see a tendency to nationalize the resistance movement as shown by Ekaterina Makhotina in her dissertation on WWII memory culture in Lithuania.<sup>50</sup> The Second World War is part of a patriotic discourse in Belarus for example - even today, and even at the grassroots level - and women are at the center of it. Activists used to share contemporary interpretations of the renowned wartime recruiting poster by Irakli Toidze: ‘The Motherland Calls!’ with the aim of mobilizing crowds for current anti-government protests.

In Georgia, by the late 60’s and into the 70’s, the image of the mourning mother comes to the forefront of the musealized war memory. At the same time, mother in general represents a multi-faceted metaphor since the mother-

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47 Makhotina; p. 70.

48 Otar Keinishvili; *Museum of People’s Friendship – the hearth of patriotic and international upbringing*; Society “Tsodna” of the Georgian SSR, Tbilisi, 1981, p. 9; ოთარ ყეინიშვილი; *ხალხთა მეგობრობის მუზეუმი: პატრიოტული და ინტერნაციონალური აღზრდის კერა*; საქ. სსრ საზოგადოება „ცოდნა“ თბილისი, „განათლება“; 1981.

49 Rekhviashvili; p. 31.

50 Makhotina; 2017.

land itself which mother mostly stands for bears a dualistic meaning and refers to both the Soviet Union and Georgia. At the same time, mother and motherland takes care of its offspring, but on the other hand, needs to be protected herself. In the thematic lecture on the exposition of the Gori and Gori District Museum of Battle Glory it is stated that these are two kinds of truisms: “everyone has a mother, who gave birth to them and a mother whose name is motherland.”<sup>51</sup>

In both exhibitions medical staff and women donors, whose blood is transfused for the war effort, also represent mothers. “Ana Mtchedlidze continued donating blood until 1958. She received two Honorary Donor of the Soviet Union badges, together with multiple other honors and certificates. She has now taken up the mission of raising other people’s children - one would come across her at the first children’s room of the October District Police among the adolescents. The words pronounced by the mother of a soldier who never returned from the war carry special weight.”<sup>52</sup>

Even though the image of a mother was canonized throughout the Soviet Union within the framework of the Great Patriotic War Cult during the late Socialism period <sup>53</sup> (which can also partly be explained by the regime’s increasing concerns on “what it perceived as a demographic crisis”<sup>54</sup>and partly by the fact that the Soviet State was actively propagating the idea of peace at the time), a mourning mother may carry additional symbolic meaning in Georgian exhibition practice. Namely, that of referring to the huge contributions made by the small republic on the Soviet periphery in this Victory, since mother epitomizes selfless love and always places the life of the other (of her children whom she sacrifices in this case) above hers.

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51 Daria Vashagashvili, *The Thematic Lecture; Museum of Battle Glory*; Gori, 1973, p. 6. დარია ვაშაგაშვილი; თემატური ლექცია, საბრძოლო დიდების მუზეუმი; *Тематическая лекция; “МУЗЕЙ БОЕВОЙ СЛАВЫ”*; გორი; 1973; p. 6.

52 Rekhviashvili; p. 40.

53 Tumarkin; p. 28.

54 Natalya Chernyshova; *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*; Routledge; London and New York; 2013; p. 173.

# THE EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR AT THE MUSEUM OF PEOPLE'S FRIENDSHIP

The Museum of People's Friendship was created „by the decree of the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1972 of the Central Committee in the system of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia”<sup>55</sup> as a branch of the Simon Janashia State Museum<sup>56</sup> and should be considered as an institute representative of the Party's sanctioned cultural memory.

“With the great help of the Soviet organs and the Party organs of our republic, “a new cradle of workers' international upbringing was introduced in Tbilisi” in the words of comrade Shevardnadze<sup>57</sup>– states Spartak Rekhviashvili in his publication providing the background information on the museum and a thick description of its exhibition dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. The museum began operating in 1973, but opened its first exhibition on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 1975, on the symbolic date of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>58</sup> The full name of the exhibition is as follows: “The Stationary Exposition - The Military Friendship of the Georgian People with the Fraternal Soviet Nations during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945).”<sup>59</sup> The exhibition plan was officially adopted by the Communist Party Central Committee Secretariat and the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia.<sup>60</sup> The exhibition was divided into 23 parts and displayed in 8 halls:<sup>61</sup> “1. One Day of Peaceful Life and Labor 2. First Day of War 3. Defense of Moscow 4. Defense of Leningrad 5. Defense of Stalingrad 6. Rear for the Front 7. Partisans 8. Communist Party of Georgia in the Great Patriotic War 9. Science 10. Literature 11. Theater 12. Cinema 13. Music 14. Fine Arts 15. Defense of the Caucasus 16. Liberation of Crimea and Novorossiysk 17. Belorussia 18. Georgian Women in the Great Patriotic War 19. Ukraine 20. The Baltics 21. Liberation of the European States 22. Hall of the Mourning Mothers 23. The Victory Hall.”<sup>62</sup>

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55 Keinishvili; p. 4.

56 *Ibid*; p. 32.

57 E. A. Shevardnadze, Civil Uprising, newspaper “Literary Georgia” 13, VIII, 1974; cited in: Spartak Rekhviashvili; *The Hearth of the International Uprising and Brotherhood*; „Ganatileba” Printing Press; Tbilisi, 1984. p. 3.

58 Rekhviashvili; p. 3.

59 Keinishvili; p. 4.

60 *Ibid*; p. 6.

61 Rekhviashvili; p. 4.

62 *Ibid*.

The exhibition concept focused on the topic of friendship among Soviet nations during the Great Patriotic War with an emphasis on the Russian-Georgian military friendship and cooperation against the backdrop of the ideas of socialist internationalism in the Soviet Union of that time.<sup>63</sup> Special attention was granted to the topic of Georgian-Ukrainian and Georgian-Belarusian friendship as well. Therefore, it can be argued that the central axis of the narrative was Georgian-Slavic brotherhood. The mere fact of opening such a museum under the auspices of the main History Museum in the center of the capital could be regarded as a reaction to the growing national sentiments in the Soviet periphery. To highlight the centuries-long tradition of friendship between the nations, the exhibition opened with the famous words of the renowned Georgian medieval poet Shota Rustaveli:<sup>64</sup> "A friend should spare himself no earthly trouble bearing a friend's load. He should give heart for heart; unroll his love as both bridge and road."<sup>65</sup> One learns from the text by Spartak Rekhviashvili that the sensory experience at the exhibition was not limited just to observing the exhibits through seeing, the wartime songs,<sup>66</sup> and the radio appeals<sup>67</sup> were to be heard while visiting the space. It is likewise interesting that the exhibition concept merged emotional and more rational dimensions into a single frame. Otar Keinishvili specifically points out in his publication that the Museum of People's Friendship is also a research institute and has a truly educational-scientific profile.<sup>68</sup>

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63 *Museum of People's Friendship – The Hearth of the Pupils' Upbringing*; Ministry of Education of Georgian SSR; The Republic's Scientific Methodological Center of Ideological and Moral Upbringing; Tbilisi, 1976; p. 5. ხალხთა მეგობრობის მუზეუმი - მოსწავლეთა აღზრდის კერა; საქ. სსრ განათლების სამინისტრო; იდეურ-ზნეობრივი აღზრდის რესპ. სამეც.მეთოდ. ცენტრი; თბილისი, 1976; გვ. 5.

64 Keinishvili; p. 6.

65 From the English translation by Lyn Coffin; Translation of the poem by Shota Rustaveli: *The Knight in the Panther Skin*; Poezia Press; 2015.

66 Rekhviashvili; p. 7.

67 Keinishvili; p. 20.

68 *Ibid*; p. 5.

# WOMEN IN THE EXHIBITION DEDICATED TO THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR AT THE PEOPLE'S FRIENDSHIP MUSEUM

The following types of women participating in the Second World War can be identified at the exhibition of the Museum of People's Friendship: a woman worker providing the front with the necessary material resources or a woman taking care of wounded soldiers brought from the battlefields to the places of safety and those taking care of orphans; a partisan woman, a donor and a nurse and a hero mourning mother sacrificing her sons for the motherland and taking pride in their sacred devotion.

Speaking of the exhibition structure, the spaces are segregated and there is a separate section, with a separate display stand showcasing and telling the story of Georgian female war participants. They are introduced at a rather late stage in the exhibition narrative. This indicates the expulsion of women from the general historical storytelling and at the same time implies the wish to create morally sterile, pure, and unproblematic spaces.

Even though the representational patterns vary according to the media they are transmitted from, and one gets a quite diverse picture across different republics, there are still similarities that can be detected. These similarities could help establish some new arguments in the absence of fundamental research on the topic and the limited access to the archival sources during the pandemic.

These segregated spaces are visible in the post-war memoir literature as well. The Veteran Memoirs are published selectively, and women are among those particularly deprived of their right to introspect their pasts and to remember by invoking their traumatic experiences.<sup>69</sup> This is directly related to the stigma against women combatants, especially the ones from the mixed combat units, who are very often referred to as: "mobile field wives"<sup>70</sup> in the context of public ethics particularly hostile to the discussions on sexuality. Only the distinguished representatives of the elite bomber units that were exclusively composed of women enjoy the privilege of writing on their wartime experience.<sup>71</sup>

In the exhibition descriptions, there is no mention at all of the sexual violence suffered by women in the Red Army on behalf of German Wehrmacht

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69 Scheide; p. 239.

70 R. D. Markwick; p.226.

71 Scheide; p. 236.

soldiers. Generally, sexual violence is a taboo topic of war-related collective memory, since Soviet women had to confront the violence perpetuated by their fellow male soldiers as well.<sup>72</sup>

On a micro level, in the text about the exhibition the word woman is very frequently mentioned together with man in a family context, and her abilities are usually measured in comparison with that of a man. “The Merkviladze family – mother, father and three children, all five of whom went to the front, no one stayed at home.” They left a note at the door: “we all went to the front.”<sup>73</sup> “He (the Lieutenant Giorgi Ananiashvili) joined partisans, he was followed with her daughter Lena.”<sup>74</sup> Spartak Rekhviashvili refers to another text to strengthen the tone: “A. Aghladze compares the sacrifice of T. Iosebidze and N. Tatumashvili with the heroism of V. Talalikhin, N. Gastelo and the Matrosovs. “We should place the patriotic self-sacrifice, he writes, of Tina Iosebidze and Nadezhda Tatumashvili next to these names.”<sup>75</sup>

Compared to the photos of the rear showing women digging foxholes, or them working on the farm, women are almost never depicted holding guns while engaging on the battlefield. The armament is also rarely found in their personal belongings that are on display. Although Galina Jashi reaching Berlin and scratching her autograph on the Reichstag wall<sup>76</sup> makes her mark in the history of WWII, her role in the warfare is to take care of the wounded soldiers. In a similar vein, Tina Iosebidze and Zoia Rukhadze are heroes but the victim heroes. However, the portrait representations at both exhibitions are interestingly quite diverse and ambivalent. Next to more feminine forms of expression we encounter *emancipated* women throwing the ascetic warrior glance to the viewers.

According to Lynne Attwood, the cinematic representations of women of that time are in general, more complex than might be thought of the Brezhnev era, usually portrayed as a period of re-Stalinization and the return to traditional values and gender roles.<sup>77</sup> A conflict emerges: women are successful in their careers but, at the same time, unhappy in their private lives. However, women characters react variously and not always according to their pre-determined fate. The female protagonist of Lana Ghoghoberidze’s “Some Interviews on Personal Matters” is cited as one of the examples.<sup>78</sup>

Looking at the entire exhibition narrative, representational strategies are quite stable and this can be explained by the fact that museums can generally be regarded as

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72 R. D. Markwick; p.226.

73 Rekhviashvili; p. 8.

74 *Ibid*; p. 9.

75 Rekhviashvili; p. 143.

76 Keinishvili; p. 14.

77 Lynne Attwood (ed.) with Maya Turovskaya, Oksana Bulgakova, Elena Stishova, Dilyara Tasbulatova, Marina Drozdova and Maria Vizitei; *Red Women on the Silver Screen, Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*; Pandora Press; 1993; Part 1 by Lynn Attwood; *Women, Cinema and Society; Leonid Brezhnev: 'The Era of Stagnation'*; pp. 87-93.

78 Lynne Attwood (ed.) with Maya Turovskaya, Oksana Bulgakova, Elena Stishova, Dilyara Tasbulatova, Marina Drozdova and Maria Vizitei; pp. 92-93.

conservative institutions. But again, the portraits reveal quite an ambiguity.

Similar ambiguities can be observed in the publication about the exhibition: “The virgins who prematurely became women during the war, had to face a very difficult fate. They only witnessed the sun and the spring of 20 years. They loved life – no one thought of a death. They were marching on the war paths with love, courage and hope as the triangle cards illustrate – I am feeling well, girls are well too, we strike the enemy, the victory will be ours.”<sup>79</sup> Spartak Rekhviashvili specifically notes that Tina Iosebidze fired a hand grenade at enemy just before her heroic suicide.<sup>80</sup> A partisan woman, Z. Partnova, on the other hand is depicted as a seducer who captivates the enemy with her looks and charisma to divert his attention and clear the way for the military actions of the male soldier.<sup>81</sup>

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79 Rekhviashvili; p. 136.

80 *Ibid*; p. 143.

81 *Ibid*; p. 58.

# GORI AND GORI DISTRICT MUSEUM OF BATTLE GLORY

Moving to the regional level, the Gori Museum of Battle Glory was selected as another case study because Stalin's hometown of Gori, while situated a short distance from the capital, represents a unique place of memory<sup>82</sup> of Stalin and respectively on the Second World War in Georgia.

The museum was founded in 1968 and opened its doors to visitors on the symbolic date of the 9<sup>th</sup> of May of the same year.<sup>83</sup> The museum was created on a public initiative but from 1973 onward it became part of the Stalin State Museum and moved on to the state budget. The director, Mrs. Daria Vashagashvili, has head the place since 1972. A Russian philologist by training, she worked as a guide at the Stalin Museum before she came to the Museum of Battle Glory. Mrs. Vashagashvili mentions that, while unfortunately the younger generation shows only a gleam of interest towards war history today, the museum is still a place of encounter for the war veterans of Gori. Vashagashvili herself was actively involved in creating the concept and collecting the exhibits: "You asked me a while ago about women, about the participation of ladies... [well] they created a Women's Veteran Council, these women. And by the way, they worked very well collecting the objects... they paid close attention to this museum."<sup>84</sup>

Vashagashvili recalls that Colonel Shalva Odisharia from the local military commissariat, was telling her how he 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. With the help of the City Committee the exhibition was organized on the first floor of the residential house. However, Vashagashvili notes that "when I moved here in 1972, I was not so pleased. It was the very first exhibition, but it was at a very low level and so were the photos. I asked for financial help from the Ministry of Culture so I could change the museum. They offered some funding and sent us some decent professionals – artists and engineers... Gradually, step-by-step, new photos and new material arrived. It took me two or three months to collect this photo-material from the publishing houses. We gathered the material and linked

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82 The concept of *place of memory/site of memory*; (*lieu de mémoire* in French) was introduced by French historian, Pierre Nora; see: Pierre Nora; *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*; Representations No.26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory; Published by California University Press; Spring, 1989; pp. 7-24.

83 S. Jioevi; *First in the Transcaucasus (The Museum of Battle Glory in Gori)*; Soviet Ossetia, Staliniri; 1<sup>st</sup> of November; 1968; ს. ჯიოევი; პირველი ამიერკავკასიაში (საბრძოლო დიდების მუზეუმი ქ. გორში); საბჭოთა ოსეთი, სტალინირი; 1 ნოემბერი; 1968.

84 Interview with Daria Vashagashvili held in Gori, 01.11.2020.

this stuff belonging to the veterans from Gori and the Gori district to different fronts of the war.<sup>85</sup> This whole periodization according to *Hero Cities* and *War Fronts* locates the participation of Gori residents in the Great Patriotic War into the Soviet context.

From what Vashagashvili says, it can be concluded that she grants particular importance to the question of state patronage, which in the Soviet context provided a high level of legitimacy and financial support for her project. Therefore, the role of Vashagashvili as an important agent in reorganizing the exhibition should not be perceived in a narrow sense and therefore, underestimated. It can however be explained by keeping the existing historical context in mind. Today an almost absolute majority of the museum staff, except for a guard, are women. And it is quite interesting to look at how local women took part in preserving the war memory in juxtaposition to the place they occupy in its iconography.

At the Gori and Gori District Museum of Battle Glory showing the local transformations of the Cult of the Great Patriotic War – the Mourning Mother, the big portrait of Stalin and the statue of Lenin<sup>86</sup> – were all parts of one representational complex.<sup>87</sup> Generally, the Leninist iconography<sup>88</sup> of the Brezhnev era promoted “the themes of patriotism, loyalty, and discipline.”<sup>89</sup>

On the map of the exhibition booklet, the museum, as place of memory, is presented in the urban context and organized around Stalin. This link with the outside world would have been particularly tangible before the windows facing the main avenue were walled up by the decision of the Ministry of Culture of Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic because the unbearable heat in summer was damaging the quality of the displayed photos, according to Vashagashvili.<sup>90</sup> It is not by chance that this map shows the Stalin Museum, The Museum of Battle Glory, the Gori Fortress, and the Gori Historical-Ethnographic Museum together. Today the Museum of Battle Glory belongs to the Historical-Ethnographic Museum, while Stalin remains the connecting symbol of the layered narratives present here.

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85 *Ibid.*

86 Gori and Gori district of Georgian SSR Museum of Battle Glory; a booklet; Academy of Sciences of Georgian SSR Printing Press; Tbilisi, date not indicated; საქართველოს სსრ გორისა და გორის რაიონის საბრძოლო დიდების მუზეუმის (Музей боевой славы г. Гори и горийского района Грузинской ССР) ბუკლეტი; საქ. სსრ მეცნ. აკადემიის სტამბა, თბილისი. თარიღი მითითებული არ არის.

87 *Ibid.*

88 Sherlock; p. 54.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Interview with Daria Vashagashvili; held in Gori, 01.11.2020.

# WOMEN IN SOVIET, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL NARRATIVES

On the example of Stalin State Museum,<sup>91</sup> Kathrine Gotfredsen discusses the coexistence of the Soviet and national narratives, as well as the vagueness of the interpretational space in-between.<sup>92</sup> These layers are visible both in the exhibition of the Museum of Battle Glory and the Museum of People's Friendship. On a famous recruiting poster by Irakli Toidze titled "The Motherland Calls," the strict gaze<sup>93</sup> of a peasant woman wearing a headscarf appeals to Soviet citizens to join the war. In both exhibitions she represents the Soviet homeland.

A partisan woman, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya is an allegory of a motherland<sup>94</sup> brutalized and ravaged by the enemy. At the same time, she is hailed as a victim and not a combatant.<sup>95</sup> Identical photos of the tortured body of Kosmodemyanskaya can be found in both exhibitions. The iconic victim of the Siege of Leningrad, the young girl Tanya Savicheva is present too. In all these cases the representations are part of the Soviet narrative. However, together with Russian Zoya, Georgian Zoya Rukhadze is exhibited in the People's Friendship Museum.

The portrayal of the grieving mother in black and white photos displayed in the "Hall of the Mourning Mothers" at the People's Friendship museum loads the aesthetics of documentary (although still heroic, of course) storytelling with emotional elements. The traditional hearth situated in the hall places the Georgian mother (displayed together with the mothers of different nationality pleading for peace) in an ethnocultural dimension. The image of a sculpture by Merab Berdzenishvili stretched on the wall provides additional commentary on her *Georgianness* together with other attributes of folk culture:

"The hearth is lit underneath the central pillar <sup>96</sup>as if it is waiting for someone to come. Mothers dressed in their black mourning clothes stare at us - they are the ones who raised these heroes for the homeland, the heroes who never came back home. Mothers still wait for them even today." Photos spread from

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91 Same as Stalin State Museum.

92 Gotfredsen; pp. 87-89 cited in: Ana Lolua; *A True Face of a Soviet Dictator; Representation of Stalin and his Legacy in Contemporary Georgia*; MA thesis; Central European University; Nationalism Studies Program; Budapest, 2020.

93 R.D. Markwick; p. 220.

94 Elizabeth Waters; *Heroism in the Frame: Gender, Nationality and Propaganda in Tashkent and Moscow, 1924-1945*; Chapter 14 in: Melanie Ilic (ed.) *Palgrave handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*; 2018; p. 208;

95 R.D. Markwick; p. 225.

96 Similarly, as in Georgian folk architecture

the ceiling to the floor as frescoes depicting Mariam Vashakidze, Marisha Arshba, Barbare Bakhtadze, Pelagia Shlyapkina, Nino Leselidze, Tebro Mosulishvili, mother Kornelia and others who look down at us as if their pensive faces plea: “The atrocities of war never again!” The bell rings and the visiting guests lay flowers around the eternal hearth. One of the walls of the hall portrays the famous statue by sculptor Merab Berdzenishvili, “Should they Grow up Again...”<sup>97</sup>

The woman here is relegated to the realm of ethnic culture, while the man acts in a progressive history. The male combatant is the liberator who introduces the civilization and perpetuates it. The cover of the booklet of the Battle Glory Museum depicts a Soviet soldier, a liberator and a guardian of the future with a child in his hand and a sword, piercing the Swastika<sup>98</sup> and saving the world enslaved by fascist barbarians.<sup>99</sup>

The introduction of the photo album at the Museum of People’s Friendship addressed to the young reader says: ...” If he lifts the bond stone even higher and so it will be<sup>100</sup> then his father will rejoice in happiness. The Fatherland will rejoice too, as the fatherland wishes this to be the case. The first five-year plans, the virgin lands, first human spaceflight, this is the bond stone for which the generations were trained to lift, one generation replaced the other, son replaced his father, but the youthful heart and enthusiasm did not change.”<sup>101</sup> Even if the bond stone is an element of Georgian folk culture, here, father defines the course of progress by participating in it.

In the Museum of Battle Glory “the sculpture of a “Mourning Mother” by Sergo Zazashvili yields the exhibition hall an atmosphere of grief. A woman with her head bowed and a deep sorrow nestled in her eyes proudly disposes the wreath on the grave of her son. Here is the grave of an unknown soldier with a spear and a shield and a headscarf of a Georgian mother (*Mandili*; მანდილი) placed on the top of it.”<sup>102</sup>

According to the statement in the introduction of the thematic lecture of the exhibition: “The Museum of Battle Glory was opened with the aim of immortal-

97 Keinishvili; p. 20.

98 “Soldier Liberator”; a memorial dedicated to Soviet soldiers fallen in the Berlin battle. Was erected in Trepotow Park in 1949; Sculptor: E. V. Vuchetich; “A symbol of the Soviet Union’s domination of East Germany, this statue served for the decades as the prime image of the cult of the Great Patriotic War,” cited in: Nina Tumarkin; 1994; inserted illustrations.

99 Gori and Gori district of Georgian SSR Museum of Battle Glory; a booklet; Academy of Sciences of Georgian SSR Printing Press; Tbilisi; date not indicated.

100 Lifting the bond stone is a metaphor of overcoming a major obstacle in this context. According to the online ethnographic dictionary of Georgian material culture this was a stone of a huge size placed at the selected spot in the village and the strong village men would grapple with it and try to lift it. See: <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=39&t=4042> last accessed on 06.12.2020.

101 R. Mamulashvili (compiler) T. Badurashvili (ed.) *The Museum of People’s Friendship to Komsomol (Brother, your strength lies in your brother*: Photo album); The Museum of People’s Friendship of Georgian SSR Academy of Sciences; Tbilisi, Khelovneba, 1978; p. 1; რ. მამულაშვილი (შემდგ.); თ. ბადურაშვილი(რედ.); ხალხთა მეგობრობის მუზეუმი საქართველოს კომკავშირს (ძმაო ძმითა ხარ ძლიერო: ფოტოალბომი); საქ. სსრ მეც. აკად. ხალხთა მეგობრობის მუზეუმი, თბილისი, ხელოვნება, 1978; გვ. 1.

102 K. Meskhi; Museum of the Battle Glory (*About the museum created at I.B Stalin Memorial Museum in Gori*); Sakhalkho Ganatleba; Tbilisi, 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 1970; p. 3; კ. მესხი; საბრძოლო დიდების მუზეუმი (გორის ი.ბ.სტალინის სახლ-მუზეუმთან შექმნილ საბრძოლო დიდების მუზეუმის შესახებ); სახალხო განათლება, თბილისი, 24 იანვარი, 1970; გვ. 3.

izing the memory of those participating in the Great Patriotic War and of educating the youth on the military traditions of their fathers and older brothers.”<sup>103</sup> Again, the leading figures are the male warriors, while their photos are presented as sources reconnecting with the realities of war. The newspaper article also states: “There is a Museum of Battle Glory in Gori next to the Stalin Memorial Museum.”<sup>104</sup> Its walls are covered with photos depicting the courageous male warriors of different age and of different appearance.”<sup>105</sup>

Interestingly, the plants in the clay pots placed around the portrait of Stalin, Lenin’s statue and the sculpture of a Mourning Mother,<sup>106</sup> are indicative of the symbolic associations among the three, having a ritualistic meaning and standing as an allegory of life renewal at the same time: ‘The war is over and life should go on’ is the message. Among these artifacts, however, only Stalin is present in the exhibition today, although in a different form. According to Vashagashvili, Stalin’s portrait was damaged in the 90’s and was taken down, while the marble statue of Stalin added to the exhibition from the Stalin Museum collections earlier in 1975 was retained.<sup>107</sup>

Indications of the Georgianness of the Mourning Mother have disappeared, as the sculpture by Zazashvili was removed due to the damage incurred during the renovation work undertaken in 1982.<sup>108</sup> On the photos depicting the scenes of seeing off soldiers to the frontline, home does not mean Georgia either. This is the impression one gets from the composition of specific photos, as well as from the fact that the photos are integrated into the sections divided thematically according to major battles. Therefore, the viewer guesses that the ceremony of saying farewell to soldiers is happening somewhere outside Georgia. Large images of mothers dressed in black mourning clothes now set a different mood, transforming the national ritual of mourning into the Soviet ritual. Portraits have no names on them and some of these images are reproduced from exhibition to exhibition. Therefore, these quite famous faces are now paradoxically transformed into anonymous and universal archetypes of grief. Two photos of mourning mothers – one of whom stares at the photograph of her deceased son – are placed in an altar-like cavity in the exhibition wall, and the images create allusion to Mother Mary expanding the context even further.

While discussing the modifications that affect the exhibition, Vashagashvili stresses the importance of museums complying with contemporary developments. In 1982, the stands dedicated to the participants of the Afghanistan War were added to the exhibition. And over the last decades stands dedicated to the participants of the armed conflicts of the 90’s and photos of the participants of the August War 2008, as well as other related objects such as the shells found

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103 Daria Vashagashvili; 1973; p. 1.

104 The same as Stalin State Museum.

105 K. Meskhi; 1970; p. 3

106 Gori and Gori district of Georgian SSR Museum of Battle Glory; Tbilisi, date not indicated.

107 Information provided by Daria Vashagashvili.

108 *Ibid.*

on the territory of Gori have appeared in the space.<sup>109</sup> This seemingly eccentric blend of Great Patriotic War and the Russo-Georgian August War makes more sense when the objectives behind it are explained: the administration understands very well that if the museum does not liberate itself from the purely Soviet narrative, it will lose its relevance. Using similar reasoning, the statue of Lenin left the space in 1985.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, exhibition guests are still confused by the atmosphere here and it is Stalin whose statue is placed in the center along the exhibition wall, that is supposed to hold these contradictory narratives together.

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109 Interview with Daria Vashagashvili held in Gori; 01.11. 2020.

110 Information provided by Daria Vashagashvili.

# CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed the forms and content of women representation, the related symbols, as well as the language used to communicate these symbols to the broader masses in late socialist Georgia. This analysis was based on the examples of two exhibitions dedicated to the Great Patriotic War: the exhibition at the Museum of People's Friendship and the exhibition of the Gori and Gori District Museum of Battle Glory. This endeavor was supported through the use of the visual materials that were available, the exhibition descriptions and the secondary literature.

In dialogue with the existing scholarship mainly focusing on the experience of Eastern Europe and Russia, these two exhibitions allow us to track the patterns of women's representation in the cultural memory in Georgia of the Great Patriotic War, against the backdrop of the rise of the Great Patriotic War Cult and the ideas of Leninist Internationalism.

As already noted, due to the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to collect and thoroughly go through the archival material. Therefore, in order to back up the assumptions presented here, tracing the changes in time and critically examining the practices of adding objects or taking them out of the space is necessary. Detangling the complex interrelationships among these objects and the engaged actors will also be required. Additionally, it is equally important to investigate the visitor reactions in the future to be able to comprehensively evaluate the processes of the formation of WWII collective memory in Georgia on the example of museums.

Through the analysis of the available textual and visual material, the following discursive topoi of women representation were identified: **Women's involvement in war was a force majeure event; women fight bravely like men and shoulder to shoulder with men;** Georgian mother in the exhibition represents a mainstay of ethnic culture, while father is a historical agent.

The Georgian experience reflects some general tendencies in different ways: ambivalence in forms of expression, the entanglement of Soviet and national narratives and the image of a mother acquiring an additional importance in the territory physically alienated from the frontline travels amongst these layers. Partisans, aviators, and other combatant women are placed at the next stage of progress and modernity after male liberators shaping the course of history. As a result, in the example of the Gori Museum of Battle Glory, the modification of cultural context for the artifacts on display or transforming the context through the removal of these artifacts lead to the qualitative transformation of the exhibition narrative. However, women remain secondary actors.

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# ANNEX



photo №1



photo №2

Taken from: *“The Hearth of the International Upbringing and Brotherhood* by S. Rekhviashvili; M. Bokolishvili (ed.); Ganatleba Printing Press; Tbilisi, 1984.



photo №3



photo №4



photo №5

From the exhibition at the Gori Museum of Battle Glory; June, 2020.

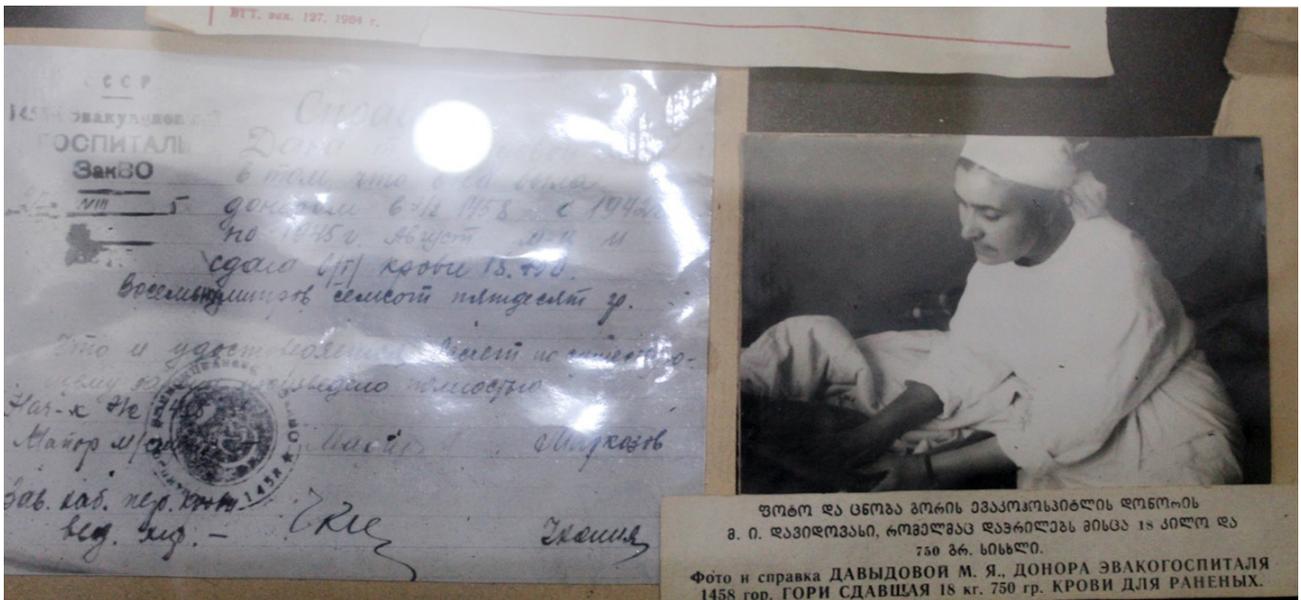


photo №6



photo №7

The exhibit name: 'The military shirt and the cap of the Great Patriotic War participant, Meri Jioeva.'

From the exhibition at the Gori Museum of Battle Glory; June, 2020.



photo №8

On the photo:  
The corpse of tortured Zoya  
Kosmodemyanskaya.



photo №9



photo №10



photo №11



photo №12



photo №13



photo №14

From the exhibition at the Gori Museum of Battle Glory; June 2020.



photo №15

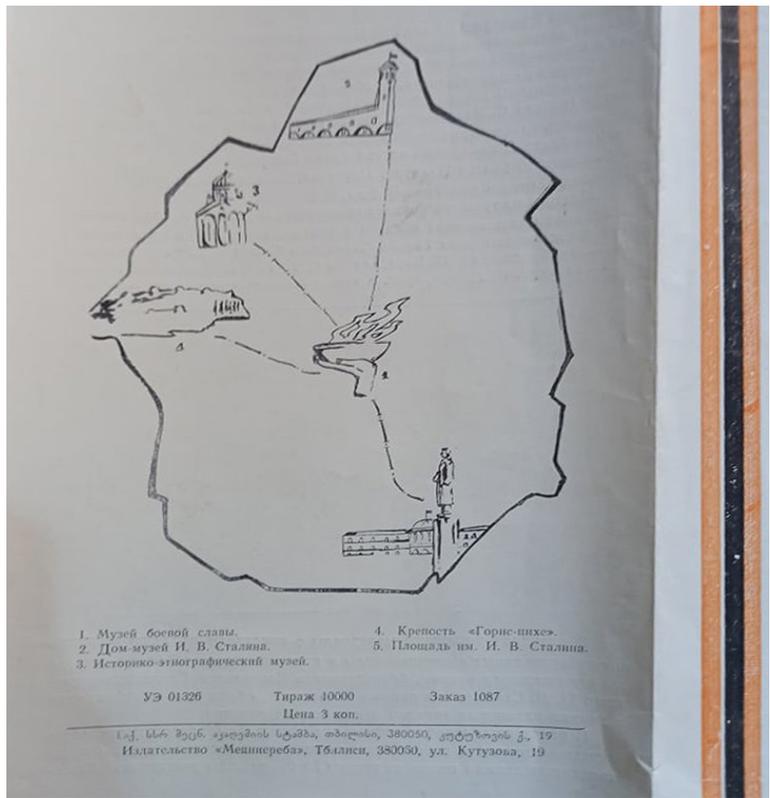


photo №16



photo №18



photo №17



photo № 19

From the booklet on Gori and Gori district of Georgian SSR Museum of Battle Glory; Academy of Sciences of Georgian SSR Printing Press; Tbilisi, date not indicated.

