**War and national memory. Georgian, Polish and British perspectives.**


## Abstract

Essentialist understandings of ethnicity and nationhood suggest that ethnic or national identities are set in stone and hence immutable, but we argue that they are continuously developed into existence through past and present narratives, as they are articulated through historical accounts, national myths and stories of the dead. The most emotionally powerful symbols of historical memory supporting those narratives are war memorials and museums, where the nation's dead are remembered. We explore the ways human war casualties are remembered -and not remembered- through the study of memorials and museums in three different national contexts: in Georgia, in Poland and in Great Britain.



**Keywords: memorial, war, museum, identity, history, memory politics, casualties, militarism, myths**


## Introduction

Jan Assmann, a well-known researcher of the relationship between history and memory, believed that culture unites contemporary society and its ancestors throughout history, creating a 'symbolic world of meaning' (area of experiences, expectations) [1]. Based on the community of historical fate and the accumulation of collective myths in the nation, it is possible to create durability and integrate a certain collective consciousness. Cultural memory is formulated by storing significant experiences and memories from the past and incorporating them into the consciousness of generations living in the present.

Since ancient times, the narrative of the sacrifice made on the altar of the homeland has become a factor building the identity and collective memory of the community. The topic of sacrifice for the homeland has become the basis of civic education since the times of the ancient Greek tragedians *Iphigenia in Aulis* or *The Phoenician Women* by Euripides). Pericles of Athens, the Greek politician and commander said that war heroes 'became immortal like gods'[2]. According to Pericles, it is the honor and respect of people that makes war heroes immortal on a par with gods. The empires were also quick to demand a spirit of community sacrifice. The court poet of Emperor Octavian Augustus, Horace, in his Odes, exhorted Roman citizens to develop courage so that Rome's enemies, especially the Parthians, would be too terrified to resist the

[1] Jan Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość cywilizacji starożytnych*, (Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination) Anna Krzyczyńska-Pham. trans. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), 33.

[2] Plutarch z Cheronei , *Żywot sławnych mężów (Z Żywotów równoległych)*, (Plutarch's lives), Mieczysław Brożek. trans. (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich, 1976), 69.

Romans. He pointed out that: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (What joy, for fatherland to die!) [3].

The postmodernist breakthrough in looking at the historian's work highlighted the process of reconstructing the past and the nature of the relationship between memory and history. According to Jacques Le Goff, the famous medievalist, history after the Second World War is the history of an ordinary man. The new story does not respond to the needs of nations nor is it a teacher of life but becomes part of the search for identity. 'History is a kingdom of inaccuracies and imperfections,' argued Le Goff[4]. The belief that history says more about today than yesterday is one that is expressed by many other historians. In this group we can include: Dawid Lowenthal ('memory does not preserve the past but adapts it to current conditions'),[5] Benedetto Croce ('contemporaneity is not a class of history, rather it is the intrinsic aspect of every story'),[6] Marc Bloch ('we understand the present through the past')[7] and Hayden White ('historiography as a literary work in which events are told and explained by the author')[8].

The cyclical rebirth of the past results from the need to build a place where subsequent generations can settle and define their identity. In this process, the narrative about war victims serves to universalize this narrative in the spirit of consensus building. The myth of sacrifice on the altar of freedom increases self-esteem and adds a sense of moral superiority. According to Hans Ulbricht Gumbrecht, history in its function serves what religion serves[9]. The Catholic religion makes Christ present in the Eucharist and through it the guilt of sins is redeemed. Similarly, history - according to Gumbrecht - makes the past present and gives nations a chance to redeem their sins.

Nations see themselves as immemorial: while the nation and its culture may alter and evolve over time, its identity is unchanging. The purpose of nationalism is to rediscover and appropriate the past in order the better to build on it. Myths play a large role in the national narrative linking past and present, as the nation 'remembers'. Nationalism emerges from conflict/war and fuels or justifies further conflict/war, in a cycle or (as it moves through time) causal chain. The nation remembers the war dead, or those who suffered physical and emotional trauma, in its myths about its ancestors, its myths about its homeland, its myths about its distinct character and in its myths about its enemies. War is a thread connecting all national myths, as the nation remembers casualties. Through war narratives, nations project power at home and

---

[3] Horace, *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace*. John Conington. trans. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882).
[4] Jacques Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć*, (History and Memory) Anna Gronowska, Joanna Stryjczyk, trans. (Warszawa: Znak, 2007), 105-9.
[5] David Lowenthal, *The Past is Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 210.
[6] Benedetto Croce, *Polemica sulla storia* (a cura di A. Musci), (Controversy over history (edited by A. Musci) (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2012), 59-60.
[7] Marc Bloch, The *Historian's Craft*, *Reflections* on the *Nature* and *Uses* of *History* and the *Techniques* and *Methods* of *Those* Who *Write* It (New York: Vintage Books, 1953).
[8] Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination In Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore, London: JHU Press, 1975).
[9] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, '*Użyteczność historii*' (The usefulness of history), in: Pamięć, etyka i historia (Memory, Ethics and History), ed. Domańska, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006), 119-20.

abroad, as well as conduct political discourse and debate about identity. Past traumas and triumphs are narrated as though they were being repeated in real time, while a hyperbolic and selective invocation of history serves to legitimise government policy and impose a particular understanding of patriotism that helps to interpret the world. Approved war memories, characterised by eclecticism and selectivity, provide a 'usable past'[10]. For a nation to exist, it must connect its dead, living and yet unborn to an imaginary community[11]. The events must be interpreted so as to support, legitimise and unify the nation.

This paper is the result of a research project: war losses and national memory. The aim was to conduct comparative research by collecting data on how wars in Georgia, Poland and Great Britain are remembered, how war narratives are created, and how these countries commemorate war victims. The authors conducted research in museums, archives and memorial sites.

## Georgia: the Second World War, separatism, and Russian occupation

War casualties are an important part of national identity-building, the production of national narratives and myths that serve as powerful instruments for fueling nationalism. They can be sources of conflict with other nations, ethnic or other subnational, identity groups, or just for making nationalism lively and applicable for internal political discourses and memory formation. Nationalism has proven to be an influential and functional policy during elections, for domestic political debates taking place among different political groups and parties within the country.

The above-mentioned contexts have been significant, and thus, approached and tested, while conducting the research on the instrumentalization of war casualties in Georgia.

Georgia, bearing the heavy burden of a long historical existence since the ancient times, to which the survival of a very small nation, its nationhood, and further statehood, was and still seems to be decisive, especially considering the geopolitical location of the country in one of the most challenging regions of the world: Caucasus. The nation traditionally has special admiration, if not a cult, for the dead, with rich traditions of burial ceremonies, long grief, and keeping the memory of the deceased alive over generations.[12] Such treatment of the dead, ancestors who passed away long ago, is more intense when it comes to warrior-ancestors, or soldiers who died on the battlefield during more recent armed conflicts, or the other war casualties: civilians. Those include the victims of the Second World War (1939-1945), the

[10] Jade McGlynn, *Memory Makers* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).
[11] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition. London: Verso, 2016).
[12] 'The Cult of the Dead in Georgian Life and the Cult Days Related to It'. Available at: https://milleniumlab.wordpress.com/2014/02/09/%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%AA%E1%83%95%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%97%E1%83%90-%E1%83%99%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9A%E1%83%A2%E1%83%98/. Accessed 05 December, 2024. (in Georgian); Andrew North, 'Tbilisi Sketches: Dining with the Dead'. Available at: https://culinarybackstreets.com/cities-category/tbilisi/2016/tbilisi-sketches-4/. Accessed 05 December, 2024.

Abkhazian (1992-1993) and the Samachablo (1991-1992) wars, and the Russian-Georgian war of 2008.

Taking into consideration Georgia's colonial past, from the times of the annexation firstly by the Russian Empire in the beginning of the 19th century, and then from 1921 to 1991 under Soviet rule when it was forcibly incorporated within the USSR, it seems clear why and how in Georgia, as in other Eastern European countries, history was used as an important tool of ideologization, both by the Russians and/or Soviets, and by the resistance, to preserve and revive national identity under the colonial oppression. According to the findings of research conducted in Georgia[13], one of the most important problems in the educational sector is the teaching of sacralized history.

For the study of nationalism, it is essential to examine national narratives and memory, along with conducting research in museums, archives and memorial sites, and critically analyse history textbooks for schools and other educational institutions.. The impact of history textbooks and, in general, of teaching history, has been addressed impressively by Marc Ferro, a French historian:

> 'Our image of other peoples, or of ourselves for that matter, reflects the history we are taught as children. This history marks us for life. Its representation, which is for each one of us a discovery of the world, of the past of societies, embraces all our passing or permanent opinions, so that the traces of our first questioning, our first emotions, remain indelible.'[14]

School textbooks and other study materials at universities and other educational institutions have traditionally included the study of Georgia's wars, however not much attention is devoted to them anymore. Currently there are ideas for certain controversial reforms under the consideration of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia, which plan to minimize or even remove from the curricula the study materials containing already legally restricted content under the newly adopted anti-LGBT propaganda laws[15], and addressing Georgian resistance stories against Russia, as well as topics and literature on patriotic issues of contemporary and historical times.[16] The latter could be seen as a result of an allegedly questionable turn in the foreign policy priorities and orientation of Georgia that had been based on striving to join the European Union and NATO since the country gained its independence in 1991, along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the end of the same year. The current shift is popularly perceived to be substantially anti-Western and largely towards the

---

[13] Diana Bogishvili, Irina Osepashvili, Elene Gavashelishvili, Nino Gugushvili, *Georgian National Identity: Conflict and Integration,* (Publishing House "Nekeri": Tbilisi, 2016).

[14] Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History Or How the Past is Taught to Children,* (Routledge: London and New York, 2003).

[15] Nini Gabritchidze, 'Georgian Dream's Oppressive Anti-LGBT Law Comes into Effect'. Available at: https://civil.ge/archives/640509. Accessed 04 December, 2024.

[16] Ambebi.ge, 'Sulkhan-Saba's Fables, Alexander Kazbegi's Works, Ilia's "Otaraant Qvrivi"... - Which other authors and works were removed from the Unified National Examination Program?' Available at: https://www.ambebi.ge/article/318522-sulxan-sabas-igav-arakebi-aleksandre-qazbegis-shem/. Accessed 04 December, 2024. (in Georgian)

approximation with or even actual entering the Russian sphere of influence, i.e. the Russian orbit that is formally promoted by the country's de facto leadership.

The Shindisi Heroes Memorial (opened in 2023[17]) in Shindisi village, Gori district of Shida Kartli region, might serve as one of the most significant symbols for the still ongoing process of national identity-building in contemporary Georgia. Part of the legacy of the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008, on August 11, 2008, the 21-member detachment of Georgian soldiers came face-to-face with Russian soldiers in the Battle of Shindisi, and despite their being outnumbered, Georgians refused to surrender and inflicted significant damage to their enemy. The 17 Georgian soldiers commemorated died in the fight.[18] The idea of a permanent resistance saving and preserving Georgia's independence and sovereignty that are being attacked historically and in modern times by its northern neighbor Russia (perceived as the main threat to Georgia), as well as halting the spread of the Russian influence in the country, has become crucial for explaining what being 'Georgian' might mean. Particular given the incomparable differences in resources (Georgia has much smaller population, area, army, weapons and war technologies under its disposal[19]).

One of the most impactful traumatic experiences in the new and recent history of Georgia (topical and relevant even up to date, due to a variety of similar challenges being faced by the country) is connected to the Soviet occupation[20] that took place in February – March of 1921, when the Russian Soviet Red Army led a successful military campaign to overthrow the Social Democratic (Menshevik) government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (DRG) (1918-1921) and install a Bolshevik regime (under the rule of the Communist Party of Georgia). The Georgian-Soviet War was a result of the Russian expansionist policy that aimed to regain control over land that had previously been part of the former Russian Empire. The Russian-based Georgian Bolsheviks (lacking sufficient support in their native country to seize power without external intervention) contributed decisively to the Soviet annexation.[21] In 1936, Georgia became the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (S.S.R.), a full member of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Occupation Museum in the capital Tbilisi (established in 2006), part of the Georgian National Museum, houses materials representing 1921-1991 period of Georgian history, when it was under Soviet occupation. Most of items in the museum were collected from the Security Service archive, as well as archives of various museums and families. Among them

---

[17] Facebook.com, 'Shindisi Memorial'. Official Post by Georgian Dream. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1474522579757909. Accessed 12 November, 2024. (in Georgian)
[18] Agenda.ge, 'PM pays tribute to soldiers fallen in Shindisi Battle of 2008 Russia-Georgia war'. Available at: https://agenda.ge/en/news/2024/40158#gsc.tab=0. Accessed 10 November, 2024.
[19] WorldData.info, 'Country comparison: Georgia and Russia'. Available at: https://www.worlddata.info/country-comparison.php?country1=GEO&country2=RUS. Accessed 10 November, 2024; GlobalFirepower.com, 'Comparison of Georgia and Russia Military Strengths (2024)'. Available at: https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison-detail.php?form=form&country1=georgia&country2=russia&Submit=COMPARE. Accessed 10 November, 2024.
[20] Richard K. Debo, *Survival and Consolidation: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1918-1921,* (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, 1992) 182, 361–364.
[21] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Second Edition, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994) 206-207.

are documents, photos and installations. Although not always active, the museum has developed educational programs dedicated to the heroes who fought for the independence of the country.[22]

The commemoration of the triumphs and/or success stories remarkable for reinforcing the modern identity-building of an independent and successful, Western-oriented Georgia, can be seen in the Kutaisi National Museum of Military Glory sectional exhibitions of photos and other materials, including military uniforms, ammunitions, formal documents, personal belongings and letters of Georgian soldiers, fighting as one of the largest non-NATO contributors under Georgia's contemporary Missions to Afghanistan (2010-2021) and Iraq (2004-2008)[23]. Among the different materials preserved in the Kutaisi Museum are photos of Georgian soldiers with the famous American actress and filmmaker Angelina Jolie, former President of the United States Barack Obama, and former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. The Kutaisi National Museum of Military Glory, established in 1975, exibits objects connected with Georgian military history (weapons and armaments), materials and documents of the Second World War (soldiers' photos, awards, correspondence, etc.) with significant emphasis on the triumphs, such as the capture of Berlin, the 'liberation of the Eastern Europe' by Soviet forces (Soviet Army sergeant of Georgian origin Meliton Kantaria, along with Mikhail Yegorov and Aleksey Berest, hoisting a victorious Soviet flag over the Reichstag on May 1, 1945). Also depicted are traumatic experiences from the recent past - the aggressions in Abkhazia (1991-1993) and so-called South Ossetia (Samachablo) in August 2008.[24]

The Military Glory Museum in Gori (established in 1968)[25] exhibits combat awards, photos, weapons, personal belongings, and other relics of Second World War participants. It also contains similar exhibits of Georgian soldiers who fought in Afghanistan (1979-1989[26]) and Iraq (1980s[27]) during the Soviet military campaigns, among them the 'Iskander' Russian bombs and shells from the Russian weapon 'Uragan' (meaning 'hurricane'). Those were used by Russian forces in aerial attacks of Gori (the city is close to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone) and its surroundings, military targets and residential districts, during the 2008 Russia-Georgia War.[28] Along with the nearby Shindisi Heroes Memorial and the War Museum situated in

---

[22] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'Georgian National Museum. Soviet Occupation Museum'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/museum/georgian-national-museum-tbilisi-archaeological-repository/. Accessed 01 December, 2024.

[23] Maia A. Earl, Daniel Maliniak, 'Paying the Blood Price: Reflections from Georgian Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan'. Available at: https://www.wm.edu/offices/wholeofgovernment/what-we-do/research_collaborations/republic-of-georgia-research/paying-the-blood-price_reflections-from-georgian-veterans.pdf. Accessed 01 December, 2024.

[24] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'Kutaisi National Museum of Military Glory'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/museum/kutaisi-national-museum-military-glory/. Accessed 01 December, 2024.

[25] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'Military Glory Museum'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/museum/military-glory-museum/. Accessed 04 December, 2024.

[26] Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Soviet invasion of Afghanistan'. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/event/Soviet-invasion-of-Afghanistan. Accessed 01 December, 2024.

[27] Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Iran-Iraq War'. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War. Accessed 01 December, 2024.

[28] *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, Report, Volume I-III, (2009).

Ergneti village[29] (also situated in Gori Municipality), the Military Glory Museum stands as a witness and a symbol of the Russian occupation, continuous 'borderization'[30], and Georgian resistance.

The Stalin State Museum[31], devoted to Joseph Stalin, is situated in his native town Gori, where the complex of the museum was opened in 1957, while in the house of Stalin's birth, the memorial museum was opened in 1937, during the Soviet leader's lifetime. The complex includes the memorial house, Stalin's carriage, and the two-storey exhibition building. In front of the building, there is a Stalin statue. There are unique displays of presents, canvases, photos and films, while Stalin's life and activities are presented in six halls, cultivating or inspiring in visitors a sense of glory, triumph, victory, and pride, even up to date. Since 2010, a separate room in the museum has been devoted to the period of repressions, where there are also exhibited the well-known - via TV and internet, - photos depicting the 2008 Russian-Georgian War and its casualties, including the civilians.

Among the casualties of the Second World War[32] Abkhazia[33] and Samachablo[34] wars, the civilian casualties of the 2008 Russian-Georgian War[35] are identically commemorated in various museums, particularly in the Military Glory Museum of Gori and the Soviet Occupation Museum,[36] situated in the Gori State Teaching University, through the same photos and materials, alongside military casualties. A special memorial to the civilians who died or got injured during the airstrikes in the Verkhvebi quarter in Gori, in August 2008, is the Tree of Life (2008)[37], composed from parts of Russian missiles.

---

[29] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'War Museum'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/museum/war-museum/. Accessed 01 December, 2024.
[30] Mariusz Rzeszutko, 'The borderization of Georgia's breakaways as a tool of Russia's long-term struggle with the EU and NATO'. Available at: https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2022-06/Borderization_PDF.pdf. Accessed 01 December, 2024.
[31] stalinmuseum.ge, 'Stalin State Museum without restrictions'. Available at: https://www.stalinmuseum.ge/. Accessed 10 November, 2024.
[32] The National WWII Museum New Orleans, 'Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II: WWII History'. Available at: https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-worldwide-deaths-world-war. Accessed 12 November, 2024.
[33] Georgian government's Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations. Human Rights Watch interview with Committee Chairman Aleksandre Kavsadze Tbilisi, 2 January 1995, and the Abkhazian Committee for Human Rights, 'Georgia Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict', Human Rights Watch Arms Project, March 1995, Vol. 7, No. 7, p. 5.
[34] Clay Arnold, '38. Georgia/South Ossetia (1990-present)'. Available at: https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/europerussiacentral-asia-region/georgiasouth-ossetia-1990-present/. Accessed 02 December, 2024.
[35] Clay Arnold, '38. Georgia/South Ossetia (1990-present)'. Available at: https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/europerussiacentral-asia-region/georgiasouth-ossetia-1990-present/. Accessed 02 December, 2024.
[36] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'Soviet Occupation Museum'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/en/product/museum-of-occupation-7/. Accessed 14 November, 2024.
[37] qartli.ge, '"Tree of Life" planted with shell waste'. Available at: https://www.qartli.ge/ge/akhali-ambebi/article/12311-tcurvebis-narchenebith-darguli-sicockhlis-khe-. Accessed 13 November, 2024. (in Georgian)

An example of an almost-forgotten, or just very formal memorial is the Memorial to the Heroes Who Died in the Russo-Georgian War in Kutaisi[38], Imereti region, which is visited mostly by the regional administration and politicians on certain occasions, i.e. in August, to mark the 2008 war anniversaries. Another example is the Memorial Complex of the Museum of Glory in Gurjaani[39], Kakheti region. Established in 1978, the museum is dedicated to the memory of those who died in the Second World War. The museum houses medals, orders and paintings of war participants. There is an amphitheater where it is possible to show films and organize events. There is a copper monument to the 'Soldier's Father' that weighs 80 tons and is 20 metres high. A Wall for Those Who didn't Return Home has been built, where the names of the fallen soldiers are engraved. An eternal flame is lit on May 9[40], a day marking the end of the Second World War, as celebrated in the former Soviet Union. The Memorial to the Fighters for a United Georgia in Gurjaani[41] is a monument located in the city park, which was created in memory of those who dedicated their lives to the struggle for the independence and unity of Georgia. The small memorial square in the city center seems to be less functional as a place of memory, and more as a gathering spot for the locals.

Among the memorial sites instrumentalized the most (by politicians who visit and pay respects, for example, during election campaigns, or PR campaigns, or to justify certain policies) is the Heroes Square memorial complex in Tbilisi.[42] It consists of the Wall Memorial, Honoring the Heroes Who Lost Their Lives for the Unity of Georgia, which is decorated with different sculptures and installations, including the Memorial Banner that depicts Belarus Fighters Who Died Defending Ukraine. The 'Heroes Memorial' in the Heroes Square nearby, opened on May 26, 2010, honors all those who died protecting the territorial integrity of Georgia. The metal structure and organic glass tower is 48 meters high and is dedicated to the memory of the cadets who died in 1921 during the Soviet occupation, the leaders of the 1924 uprising, the soldiers who died in Abkhazia and Samachablo in 1992-1993, as well as those killed during the August War of 2008. The Wall Memorial of Heroes Who Lost Their Lives in the Russian-Georgian War for the Unity of Georgia[43], which belongs to the Military Glory Museum in Gori, represents another example of the common political instrumentalization of national memory.

---

[38] 1tv.ge, 'Kutaisi commemorates those killed in large-scale Russian-Georgian military intervention'. Available at: https://1tv.ge/news/qutaisshi-ruset-saqartvelos-fartomasshtabiani-samkhedro-intervenciis-shedegad-daghupulta-khsovnas-pativi-miages/. Accessed 14 November, 2024. (in Georgian)

[39] Georgianmuseums.ge, 'Memorial Museum of Glory'. Available at: https://georgianmuseums.ge/%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A3%E1%83%96%E1%83%94%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98/memorial-museum-of-glory/. Accessed 15 November, 2024. (in Georgian)

[40] Advantour, 'Victory Day in Georgia'. Available at: https://www.advantour.com/georgia/holidays/victory-day.htm. Accessed 15 November, 2024.

[41] Madloba.info, 'Memorial to fighters for a united Georgia in Gurjaani'. Available at: https://madloba.info/en/gurjaani/kuda-poiti/memorial-bortsam-za-edinuiu-gruziiu/. Accessed 15 November, 2024.

[42] ghn.ge, 'Memorial to Heroes Who Died for the Unity of Georgia Opened in Heroes Square'. Available at: https://www.ghn.ge/news/15622. Accessed 15 November, 2024. (in Georgian)

[43] Interpressnews.ge, 'Events are being held in Gori to mark the 10th anniversary of the August War'. Available at: https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/507126-agvistos-omidan-10-clistavtan-dakavshirebit-gorshi-gonisziebebi-imarteba. Accessed 10 November, 2024. (in Georgian)

**Poland: the Second World War experience**

The shaping of Polish politics of memory in the last three decades has been the result of many factors, including the post-communist nature of the state, the dispute over its role in narrating history, the Polish-Russian conflict over memory, the discourse on Polish-Jewish wartime relations, the internationalization of Polish historical narrative, as well as the 'memory boom' and the development of public diplomacy[44].

The Second World War has become the most important reference point for memory politics. This emphasis stems from the apocalyptic nature of the Second World War, which constituted a hecatomb for Poland's population, destroyed its national elite and permanently changed the country's ethnic and cultural mosaic. As a result of the agreement between the Third Reich and the USSR called the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (August 23, 1939), Poland was invaded by the German (September 1) and the Soviet (September 17) armies, with its territory subsequently divided between the two occupiers (28 September 1939)[45]. The Polish government in exile (in France, and after June 1940 in Britain) continued the fight for 'freedom and independence', establishing the Polish Armed Forces in the West and the subordinate structures of the Polish Underground State operating in the occupied country. Still, due to the decision of the Big Three (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin) at Yalta in 1945, the territory of Poland was reduced – 45% of the pre-war area was incorporated into the Soviet Union – and its borders shifted to the west. Under the terms of the agreement, Poland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War, with what later became the Polish People's Republic emerging from the Soviet occupation in the years 1944-1945, administered by Polish communists loyal to Moscow. In 1989, communism collapsed, and the democratic Third Republic of Poland was established.

In Poland's case, the focus of politics of memory is -broadly understood- national freedom, with the alternating periods of independence and loss of sovereignty having perpetuated this. Another focal point of the national narrative is the coexistence, at other times competition, between 'tradition' and 'modernity'[46]. 'Tradition' is understood as the defense of the highest

---

[44] Przemysław Łukasik, 'Politics of memory in Poland in the first half of the XXI century. Historical narratives, challenges and disputes. A case study', *Acta Politica Polonica* 2, no 58, (December 2024): 27.

[45] Moorhouse Roger, *First to fight. The Polish War 1939* (London: The Bodley Head, 2019); Müller Dietmar, & Troebst Stefan, 'The Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1939 in European history and memory', R*emembrance and justice*, *1* (27) 2016: 35-49.; Kaminsky Annette, Müller Dietmar and Troebst Stefan, eds., *Der Hitler–Stalin Pakt 1939 in den Erinnerungskulturen der Europäer* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag,2011); Kłoczowski Jerzy and Łaszkiewicz Hubert eds., *Poland. A history*. (Lublin: Institute of East-Central Europe, 2011); Davies Norman, '*God's playground: A history of Poland, Vol. 2: 1795 to the Present*', (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[46] Robert Kostro, Jarosław Kuisz, Krzysztof Mazur, Filip Memches, Kamil Piskała, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, 'Między sarmatyzmem a emancypacją. Rożne kierunki poszukiwań polskiej opowieści elementarnej'(*Between Sarmatism and Emancipation: Different Directions of Searching for Polish Elementary History*), In *Historia Polski od-nowa. Nowe narracje historii i muzealne reprezentacje przeszłości* (Polish History Reinvented: New Narratives of History and Museum Representations of the Past), eds. Robert Kostro, Kazimierz Wójcicki and Michał Wysocki (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, 2014), 322-360.

interests and values, with freedom and independence being inalienable imponderables. On the other hand, 'modernity' and 'modernization' are political, social, economic, and cultural changes, including development[47].

The last 30 years have also been a period of internal debate about the role of the state in relation to history. This discussion can be seen in the framework of a broader debate over whether the discipline of history should comfort and glorify or question national myths.[48] As historian Piotr Wandycz noted, the need to believe in one's own nation, tinged with certain mythology, 'seems necessary,' but it is harmful in excess[49]. He considered the acceptance of the axiom that 'chosen' nations do not exist as a barometer of normality in national narratives. Opponents of the idea of state involvement in history argue that states should only create 'frames' for the circulation of various, often contradictory representations of the past and ensure the integrity of historical research and education[50]. In contrast, defenders of the active role of the state point out that it has not only the right but also the obligation to shape collective memory and select historical content. This means building a community around 'tradition' understood as a collection of elements used to identify the national community: rituals, symbols, and founding myths and heroes. They dismiss the fear that the state can create a mythologized and one-sided vision of history, stating that in free and democratic societies this is impossible. This debate can be seen as the expression of a desire to reevaluate the role of state and national interpretations of history, following the period of historical propaganda by right-wing and communist leaders in the 20th century.

The Polish narrative of the struggle for freedom or independence is primarily a narrative of victims. It concerns the struggle for sovereignty during the partitions of 1795–1918, the struggle during the First and Second World Wars, and the resistance to communism. The focus of this paper is primarily on the events of the Second World War, which constitute a powerful narrative commemorating the victims of war[51].

---

[47] Rafał Habielski, 'Przeszłość w sferze publicznej i życiu kulturalnym 1989-2005 (obszary zainteresowań, interpretacje i nośniki)', (The past in the public sphere and cultural life 1989-2005 (areas of interest, interpretations and media) In *Historycy i politycy. Polityka pamięci w III RP* (Historians and Politicians: The Politics of Memory in the Third Polish Republic), eds. Paweł Skibiński, Tomasz Wiścicki and Michał Wysocki (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, 2011), 87.

[48] Clio is the Greek muse of history, and the name means "to make famous" or "to celebrate."

[49] Piotr Wandycz, 'Czy historia ma krzepić czy odbrązawiać? O dobrych i złych skutkach rozdrapywania blizn' (Should History glorify or question national myths? On the Good and Bad Effects of Opening Up Scars), In *O czasach dawniejszych i bliższych. Studia z dziejów Polski i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* (About the past and the present. Studies in the history of Poland and Central and Eastern Europe), ed. Piotr Wandycz, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009), 46-7.

[50] Tomasz Tokarz, 'Państwo wobec edukacji historycznej. Polskie spory u progu XXI wieku', (The State and Historical Education: Polish Disputes at the Threshold of the 21st Century), In *Pamięć, historia, polityka (*Memory, history, politics)*, eds.* , Andrzej Paweł Bieś, Marzena Chrost and Beata Topij-Stempińska (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum, 2012) 15-37.

[51] During II World War Poland lost 18,77% of the pre-war population. For comparison, the losses of the USSR were 14%, Germany and Austria 11.5%, Great Britain 0.76%. See: 'Total Second World War fatalities as a share of pre-war populations per country or region between 1939 and 1945', Statista, last modified 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1351638/second-world-war-share-total-population-loss/

In the Polish memory policy on the Second World War, the narrative encompassing civilian victims of Nazi and Soviet occupation, victims of the concentration camp system, and victims of civilian and armed resistance, is implemented using various methods: history in public spaces (names of streets and squares, monuments, national holidays), education (core curriculum, history textbooks in schools), and institutions of memory (museums, archives). The war is not presented through the prism of political history, but instead aspects belonging to social history are highlighted, and therefore related to everyday life during the war. War is a catastrophe for the population: separation, family breakdown, loss of property, suffering. There is a deliberate move away from anonymity in favor of individualization of victims. Individualization and personalization of war victims helps to influence the emotions of visitors. An attempt to move away from the national perspective after 1989 is noticeable, supplemented by the prism of universal experience, breaking with the communistic practice of Polonization of the Holocaust (1944-1989)[52].
Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, former German Nazi Concentration Camp, a world symbol of terror, genocide, and the Shoah world, is the most famous of the concentration and extermination camps (including Bełżec, Sobibór, Sztutowo) commemorating the Jewish victims of the totalitarian system. The majority of the Jews who arrived in Auschwitz in transports organized by the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), at least 1.1 million people including more than 200 thousand children and young people, were killed in the gas chambers immediately or soon after arrival[53]. The narrative of the museums located on the site of the former concentration and extermination camps emphasizes the universal nature of the crime by identifying Jewish, Polish and other victims from among 50 nations and ethnic groups.

A means of talking about the experience of occupation, and at the same time armed resistance to the occupier, is the Warsaw Uprising Museum located in the capital. The higher command of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) and the Polish Underground State decided to start the Warsaw Uprising, which lasted 63 days (1.08.1944-2.10.1944). After the Rising when the insurgents and civilians were deported from the city, German *Vernichtungskomanndo* units launched their plan to anihilate the city. In fall and winter 1944/1945 many quarters of the city were burned down, one by one. 90 percent of industrial facilities, 90 percent of historical buildings, 70 percent of apartments, 70 percent schools, 95 percent cultural institutions and all the railway stations practically ceased to exist, not to mention the whole infrastructure, when it

[52] Bartosz Korzeniowski, 'Przemiany obrazu drugiej wojny światowej w polskich muzeach po roku 1989' (Changes in the image of World War II in Polish museums after 1989), in *Druga wojna światowa w pamięci kulturowej w Polsce i w Niemczech. 70 lat później (1945-2015)* (World War II in Cultural Memory in Poland and Germany. 70 Years Later (1945-2015), eds. , Jerzy Kałażny, Amelia Korzeniowska, Bartosz Korzeniowski, (Gdańsk: Muzeum II wojny Światowej, 2015), 135.

[53] 'Auschwitz as the center for the extermination of the Jews', last modified 2024, https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/categories-of-prisoners/jews-in-auschwitz/

comes to railways and tramways[54]. The fate of the capital and its civilian inhabitants is a reason to analyze and question the decision to start the uprising even today.

The reality of occupation terror is shown in the narrative of the Gestapo Detention Center at Aleja Szucha 25 and the Pawiak Prison Museum, also located in the capital. During World War II Aleja Szucha was the headquarters of the German Security Police and almost all political prisoners from Warsaw were interrogated at this address[55]. The Pawiak Museum is located in a part of the prison, which contains witness accounts and handwritten drawings, poems and songs created by prisoners. A withered elm tree standing next to the museum, along with prisoners' obituaries, is a silent witness to history.

The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk is particularly important from the perspective of Polish memory policy and the narrative regarding the victims[56]. The creators of the museum concept intended to emphasize the fates of individuals, communities and nations, and military history was to become a background for the narrative of the everyday life of civilians and soldiers, the terror of occupation, phenomena such as genocide, resistance to the occupier and great politics. This approach was to reflect the uniqueness of the experience of the Second World War, in which civilians suffered the greatest sacrifice[57]. Showing the common experiences of the population of the occupied countries was intended to universalize the message and remove the barrier between the viewer and the exhibition [58]. The opening of the exhibition was marked by a significant debate on the subject of the exhibition's content. According to some historians, the uniqueness of the Polish war victims was lost when compared to the war experience of other nations[59]. According to others, such a compilation and

---

[54] 'Phoenix from the ashes. A short story of Warsaw that was destroyed and rebuilt', The Warsaw Uprising Museum website, last modified 26 April 2024, https://www.1944.pl/en/article/phoenix-from-the-ashes.-a-short-story-of-warsaw,5482.html

[55] Witold Żarnowski, *Rather die than betray the cause. The Gestapo Detention Center at Aleja Szuacha 25*, Warsaw: The Institute of National Remembrance Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, 2021)

[56] 'The Road to War', 'The Terror of War', 'The Long Shadow of War', Museum of the Second World War, last modified 2021, https://muzeum1939.pl/en/main-exhibition.html

[57] 'Raport z działalności Muzeum II wojny światowej za rok 2010' last modfied 2011. https://muzeum1939.pl/sites/default/files/pdf/af0876a7fcc8938f3361500922a60cfe285.pdf

[58] Bartosz Korzeniowski, 'Przemiany obrazu drugiej wojny światowej w polskich muzeach po roku 1989' (Changes in the image of World War II in Polish museums after 1989), in *Druga wojna światowa w pamięci kulturowej w Polsce i w Niemczech. 70 lat później (1945-2015)* (World War II in Cultural Memory in Poland and Germany. 70 Years Later (1945-2015), eds. , Jerzy Kałażny, Amelia Korzeniowska, Bartosz Korzeniowski, (Gdańsk: Muzeum II wojny Światowej, 2015),116.

[59]Paweł Machcewicz*, Spory o historię 2000-2011,* (Disputes over history 2000-2011), (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012); Robert Traba, *Przeszłość w teraźniejszości.Polskie spory o historię na początku XXI wieku,* (The Past in the Present: Polish Disputes over History at the Beginning of the 21st Century) (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009); Anna Wolf-Powęska, 'Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna', (Polish Disputes on History and Memory. Historical Policy), *Przegląd Zachodni*, (*1*,Poznań 2007): 18.

comparison of the war experiences of various nations made it possible to see and understand the Polish narrative.

Museums established at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in Poland, in addition to their educational and commemorative functions, are tasked with filling in blank spaces. An example of this is the Katyn Museum, whose exhibition tells about the murder of 22,000 Polish prisoners of war by the Soviet NKVD in 1940[60]. The museum is located in the Warsaw Citadel, which was built in the 1830s to suppress the Polish national liberation uprisings during the partition period. The central part of the exhibition are personal mementos recovered from the death pits, which take the form of reliquaries: 'The desire to commemorate the victims of crime is very clearly manifested here in the sacralization of the victims of crime, in particular mementos of those murdered'[61]. The elements of the museum installation designed by Jerzy Kalina have an exceptionally symbolic meaning and include 'soldier dog tags', 'sarcophagus wagons', and 'a forest scar'. Part of the museum exhibition is the history of the so-called Katyn lie, or attempts to hide the truth about the perpetrators of the crime[62]. The history of Katyn is a derivative of cultural trauma that affects a broader community than individual victims and their families. Symbolic closure of this trauma would allow for a connection that would have to include disclosure of all information, open admission of guilt by the perpetrators, establishment of ritual commemoration, establishment of a dialogue of reconciliation between representatives of the perpetrators and victims[63].

The liquidation of the nation's leadership elites, which was characterized by the actions of the German and Soviet occupation authorities during World War II, made the concept of 'Katyn' central to the Polish narrative of victims. The Palmiry Museum near Warsaw is called the 'Katyn of the West' and commemorates the executions of Poles during the so-called AB Action in 1939-1940. As in the Katyn forests, the leadership elites were shot in the Palmiry forests. The structure of the museum and its interior, designed by theater scriptwriters, among others, through pipes with trees, as well as the color scheme of the building blending into the surroundings, are intended to be one with the surroundings[64]. The surrounding forests of the Kampinos Forest were the site of anti-Russian insurgent fights in the 19th century (one of the

---

[60] Bartosz Korzeniowski, 'Przemiany obrazu drugiej wojny światowej w polskich muzeach po roku 1989' (Changes in the image of World War II in Polish museums after 1989), in *Druga wojna światowa w pamięci kulturowej w Polsce i w Niemczech. 70 lat później (1945-2015)* (World War II in Cultural Memory in Poland and Germany. 70 Years Later (1945-2015)), eds. , Jerzy Kałażny, Amelia Korzeniowska, Bartosz Korzeniowski, (Gdańsk: Muzeum II wojny Światowej, 2015),109-110.

[61] Ibidem, 110.

[62] 'Budowa Muzeum Katyńskiego',(Construction of the Katyn Museum), Katyn Museum website, last modified 17 April 2012, https://www.muzeumkatynskie.pl/pl/23224/budowa_muzeum_katynskiego.html

[63] Ron Eyerman, Dominik Bartmanski, 'The Worst Was the Silence: The Unfinished Drama of the Katyn Massacre', In *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*, ed. Ron Eyerman (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019):136-8.

[64] 'Permanent exhibition: *Executions 1939-1943. Palmiry – Kampinos Forest and Exhumations – Cemetery in Palmiry 1945-1948*', Palmiry Museum Memorial Site, last modified 2022, https://palmiry.muzeumwarszawy.pl/en/permanent-exhibition/

artifacts presented in the museum is the so-called insurgent oak, on which the occupiers hanged captured patriots).

The Piasnica Museum in Wejcherów commemorates a series of mass executions carried out by the German occupiers in the first months of the Second World War in the Piaśnica Forests near Wejherowo ('Katyn of the West'). Representatives of the Polish political, economic and cultural elite from Gdańsk Pomerania were murdered in Piaśnica. People transported by train from the Third Reich also died there. Among them were the mentally ill, opponents of Nazi ideology, and Poles and Czechs living in Germany before the war. Estimating the number of victims is very difficult because in 1944 the Germans carried out an action aimed at removing all evidence of the crime. The Museum is located in a building that was the headquarter of the district Selbstchutz (German Self-Defense) unit, from where the activities related to the executions in the Piasnica Forests were directed[65].

**Great Britain: militarism and national memory**

Great Britain is a highly militaristic state, where we see a triangular relationship between the armed forces, morality and power, at the top of which sits the Monarch. The King, also known as Commander-in-Chief, is Head of the Armed Forces. King Charles III is a former serving Naval officer, who holds several appointments and honorary ranks in the Armed Forces. Following his coronation, in 2023 it was announced on the official web site of the British Royal Family[66] that he was taking on these military affiliations:

- Colonel-in-Chief, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards
- Colonel-in-Chief, The Royal Tank Regiment
- Captain General, The Royal Artillery
- Captain General, The Honourable Artillery Company
- Colonel-in-Chief, The Royal Regiment of Scotland
- Royal Honorary Air Commodore, RAF Marham
- Air Commodore-in-Chief, RAF Regiment
- Colonel-in-Chief, The Household Division
- Captain General Royal Marines
- Colonel-in-Chief, The Royal Engineers

The Queen became the new Colonel-in-Chief of The Royal Lancers, Colonel Grenadier Guards and Colonel-in-Chief of The Rifles.

---

[65] 'How the crime was organized', The Piaśnica Museum in Wejherowo, last modified 2024, https://muzeumpiasnickie.pl/en/how-the-crime-was-organized.

[66] 'Further Military Appointments for Members of the Royal Family', royal.uk, last modified 11 August 2023, https://www.royal.uk/news-and-activity/2023-08-11/further-military-appointments-for-members-of-the-royal-family.

The previous Monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, held over fifty ranks and appointments in the UK and Commonwealth Armed Service. The Elizabeth Cross, introduced in 2009, gives special recognition to the families of those who had died on military operations. The year she died, 2022, the Queen bestowed upon former PM tony Blair, who had taken Britain to two wars in the Middle East, one of the highest honours, the most senior knighthood: he was made Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter.

The Monarch does not only sit at the head of the Armed Forces: they are also the Head of Church, holding the title Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. 'The Monarch's relationship with the Church of England is symbolised at the Coronation when the Sovereign is anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and takes an oath to "maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England".'[67] The Monarch appoints Archbishops, Bishops and Deans of the Church of England.

Thus, in Great Britain we see a clear connection between power, the military and 'official' morality, within a culture of militarism, 'a condition in which war, or the preparation of the means of war, are major social concerns, commanding a significant proportion of resources and enjoying a substantial degree of legitimacy'.[68]

Militarism can be understood as an *ideology* that glorifies war, military institutions, and the prevalence of martial values in society[69], with an 'emphasis on military considerations, ideals and values in the life of states'.[70] In this understanding, militarism involves a set of values and beliefs.[71] Another understanding is *behavioural*, conceptualizing militarism as the propensity to utilize force to resolve conflict.[72] Eide and Thee[73] define militarism as 'the inclination to rely on military means of coercion for the handling of conflicts.' Kinsella writes, 'militarism in the contemporary era is already taking form as a greater willingness of major powers to intervene forcefully in the domestic affairs of other states'.[74] A third conception of militarism equates it with *military build-ups*[75], with 'quantitative increases in weapons production and

---

[67] 'The Queen, the Church and other faiths', royal.uk, n.d., https://www.royal.uk/the-queen-the-church-and-other-faiths#:~:text=The%20Sovereign%20holds%20the%20title,1521%20by%20Pope%20Leo%20X.

[68] Donald MacKenzie, 'Militarism and Socialist Theory', *Capital and Class* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 35.
[69] Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military*, 2nd edition (New York: Meridian Books, 1959).
[70] Lily Hamourtziadou, *The Ethics of Remote Warfare* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024), 21.
[71] Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007). Michael Mann, 'The roots and contradictions of modern militarism', *New Left Review* 162, no 1 (Mar/Apr 1987).
[72] Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (eds), *Militarism and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).
[73] Asbjorn Eide and Marek Thee (eds), *Problems of Contemporary Militarism* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 9.
[74] David Kinsella, 'The global arms trade and the diffusion of militarism', in *Militarism and International Relations*, eds Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 104–16, 116.

[75] Andrew L. Ross, 'Dimensions of militarization in the third world', *Armed Forces and Society'* 13, no. 4 (1987): 561–78.

imports, military personnel and military expenditure'.[76] Finally, militarism can be *embedded within society*. Shaw writes about the penetration of social relations by military relations, where the concept of 'military' is used to describe 'all social relations, institutions and values relating to war and war preparation.[77]

Morality, or a set of ethics, is essential to militarism. In *Ethics as a Weapon of War* (2020), James Eastwood argues that morality is part of an arrangement designed to make violence easier for the military to commit, where soldiering is the acme of moral commitment, arguing that 'ethics can offer powerful support to militarism and ethics can function as a weapon of war'.[78] Deployed in the service of militarism, ethics create a moral army, one that claims moral superiority over its 'evil', 'genocidal' or 'terrorist' enemies, while the moral army's violence is 'sanctioned, justified and portrayed primarily as defensive'.[79] In militarism, military power and 'our' wars are glorified, exulted and held as manifestations of the nation's proud past, present and future.

Military force is perceived as a high principle that is right or desirable and is routinised and institutionalised in society.[80] Althusser argued that militarism is a set of discursive practices embedded in everyday life,[81] making war seem normal and even desirable, as a significant part of popular culture: 'Armies use ethics to generate a widespread and prevalent ideology of ethical soldiering that instils a belief in a moral army with strong moral values'[82]

In *The Ethics of War*, Coates refers to a type of militarism he calls 'crusading universalism', a form of imperialism, arguing that it is, in essence, moral particularism masquerading as moral universalism. 'Crusading' stands for 'the victory of one particular moral community over all the others, and the peace that it professes is dependent for its realization upon the forcible elimination of difference'.[83]

Soldiering is bestowed particular prestige, there are constant reminders of threats to national security, and martial values are tied to a superior moral culture of a morally superior nation-state, which must increase its sphere of influence and spread the correct values through war. 21st century imperialism by liberal democracies, Great Britain included, is militarist, since in respect of 'primitive' peoples it preached racial supremacy and the right of conquest.[84] Crusading masquerades as altruism, claiming to promote a better world, but resorts to coercion and deadly force, killing tens of thousands of civilians in the past 25 years. 'Ethics are at the

---

[76] Lily Hamourtziadou, *The Ethics of Remote Warfare* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024), 21.
[77] Martin Shaw, *War and Genocide: Organized Killing in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 106.
[78] James Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War. Militarism and Morality in Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3.
[79] Lily Hamourtziadou, *The Ethics of Remote Warfare* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024), 22.
[80] Uri Ben-Eliezer, *The Making of Israeli Militarism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).
[81] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[82] Lily Hamourtziadou, *The Ethics of Remote Warfare* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024), 23.
[83] A.J. Coates, *The Ethics of War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 60.
[84] Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

core of such endeavours of moral arrogance to eradicate "dangerous" regimes', and 'war is given a redemptive and transformative power, whereby a better humanity is created'.[85]

Death, especially the death of a soldier, incurred in the course of war is portrayed and praised as a form of martyrdom, self-sacrifice and the ultimate heroic act. On Remembrance Day, every 11 November, Britain falls silent to honour its 'heroes'. The red remembrance poppy, most commonly worn in the 2 weeks leading up to Remembrance Day, is the most evocative symbol of remembrance, as the British remember the dead of the First World War to those of Britain's contemporary wars. The UK's contemporary wars, since 2001, have been fought in the context of the War on Terror, and have included invasions (Afghanistan and Iraq), occupations (Afghanistan and Iraq) and remote warfare (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen). Its military activities have been linked to war crimes in Iraq[86] and in Afghanistan[87]. Yet flowers are worn by millions of citizens every year, and floral tributes are incorporated into ceremonies, churches, local/national war memorials all year round. Those flowers are part of a collective movement 'to remember'. The poppies are 'a symbol of remembrance and hope'.[88]

A key memorial to 'The Glorious Dead' is the Cenotaph. In the heart of London. It is one of over 100,000 war memorials in the UK. The monument remains a focal point for remembrance of British, Empire and Commonwealth dead. Rituals and monuments are 'crucial conduits for state remembrance of the unsurpassed death toll for British forces'.[89]

Among Britain's war memorials is the one outside Euston station in London. It is inscribed **'**In memory of our glorious dead' and urges those who look at it to 'Remember the men and women of the London Midland and Scottish Railway, 1939 – 1945'. The memorial is also 'In grateful memory of 3719 men of the London and North Western Railway company who for their country, justice and freedom served and died in the Great War, 1914 – 1919'. The monument was raised 'as a lasting memorial to their devotion'. The Stoke station memorial is dedicated to the memory of the North Staffordshire Railway men who 'fell in the Great War'. A smaller war memorial, outside the Keele village church, reminds us to 'Cease not to praise God for these men of Keele who fell gloriously', while the war memorial in the nearby town Newcastle-under-Lyme asserts: 'They died for our Freedom'.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to the war dead/ war heroes, is the National Memorial Arboretum, a 150-acre site in Staffordshire that features over 400 memorials. Their website states that the Arboretum is there to ensure that 'the unique contribution of those who have served and sacrificed is never forgotten, the baton of Remembrance is passed on through the generations,

---

[85] Lily Hamourtziadou, *The Ethics of Remote Warfare* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2024), 24.
[86] 'Situation in Iraq/UK Final Report', International Criminal Court, last modified 9 December 2020, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/201209-otp-final-report-iraq-uk-eng.pdf.
[87] Lily Hamourtziadou, 'Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan: day 3', Action on Armed Violence, last modified 11 October 2023 https://aoav.org.uk/2023/independent-inquiry-relating-to-afghanistan-day-3/.
[88] Royal British Legion, 'The Poppy', n.d., https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/about-remembrance/the-poppy#:~:text=Our%20red%20poppy%20is%20a,history%20and%20meaning%20with%20it..
[89] Laura Clouting, *A Century of Remembrance* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2018), 179.

and there is a year-round space to celebrate lives lived and commemorate lives. lost.[90] The Arboretum has around 300,000 visitors each year, including over 20,000 young people for formal and informal learning visits. Around 250 events take place on site, from small intimate services of Remembrance to set piece events like Armistice Day, Remembrance Sunday, a summer proms and Armed Forces Day.[91]

The majority of memorials in the Arboretum are to the Armed Forces, for example, the Fleet Air Arm Memorial (FLY Navy Federation), that 'honours the sacrifice made by the 6,749 men and women who gave their lives in the service of naval aviation'; the Submariners Memorial 'remembers the nearly 6,000 submariners who have given their lives in service'; the No 47 Squadron RAF Memorial, that more recently 'assisted coalition forces in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan'; the very emotive, pyramid-shaped HMS Neptune and HMS Kandahar Memorial contains a roll of honour of the 837 men who died, and 'a painting of the sky as it was on the night of the sinking'.[92]

Among the few Arboretum memorials to civilians is the one in memory of the Falklands islanders Doreen Bonner, Mary Goodwin and Susan Whitley, 'who lost their lives during the liberation of Stanley, Falkland Islands, June 1982'. The war is remembered as a 'liberation' of British overseas territory in the South Atlantic, 8,000 miles from Britain, a remnant of old British imperialism, from neighbouring Argentina.

The largest memorial in the Arboretum, the Armed Forces Memorial, 'honours those who have given their life while serving in the Armed Forces since the end of the Second World War'. Carved on its walls are the names of over 16,000 personnel. The memorial promises: 'we will remember them today, tomorrow, forever'. Among the names carved on the walls are those of the British soldiers who died in Iraq and Afghanistan, in wars of aggression, where the UK was an invading and occupying force. The more than 9,000 Iraqi and Afghan civilians who were killed in the initial invasions are not remembered. The Basrah Memorial Wall is another impressive memorial, in memory of the 179 'British personnel who have died on Operation TELIC and those coalition personnel who died in Southern Iraq'. The wall has become an icon for the British presence in Basra. The memorial was built using bricks and slabs from the original wall the British built in Basra in 2006, a city under their control following the invasion and occupation of Iraq, where they are accused of war crimes against Iraqi civilians in their custody, including murder, torture and rape, as well as cultural and religious humiliation.[93]

The Imperial War Museum in London 'remembers' Iraq too, as it offers a narrative around its invasion to liberate it from 'Saddam Hussein's brutal rule,' 'to destroy any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, break Saddam's links with global terrorism and to free the Iraqi people'. What it does not mention is that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, or links to global terrorism; nor does it mention the 7,500 Iraqi civilians killed in the 6 weeks of the invasion

[90] National Memorial Arboretum, Part of the Royal British Legion, 'Explore, Discover, Remember', n.d., https://www.thenma.org.uk/.
[91] National Memorial Arboretum, 'Who We Are', n.d., https://www.thenma.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are.
[92] National Memorial Arboretum, 'Guidebook', 61.
[93] 'Situation in Iraq/UK Final Report', International Criminal Court, last modified 9 December 2020, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/201209-otp-final-report-iraq-uk-eng.pdf.

alone[94] and the 14,000 killed in the 2014-2018 battle for Mosul against the Islamic State[95]. The Iraqi civilians the museum wants visitors to remember are those who were killed by terrorist groups. The Baghdad Car Bomb, an actual car bomb that killed 38 Iraqi civilians in March 2007 in a terrorist attack, is a 'witness to war'. Museum exhibitions like those in the Imperial War Museums reflect an increased interest in historical memory and contemporary heritage.

Memory is inextricably linked to a variety of national myths: of election (according to which the nation possesses special qualities that must be protected), of noble/virtuous/brave ancestors, of a golden age (such as one of empire), and of suffering (where enemies are identified and remembered as such)[96]. Militarism and nationalism create 'memories' of some dead, while other deaths are not remembered, in regular and irregular moral wars the nation fights, that are justified, glorified and commemorated.

As the museums and memorials commemorate Second World War victims (military and civilian) of all nationalities (notable among these are the award-winning Holocaust Galleries at the Imperial War Museum in London, where photographs, names and ages of Jewish children who died in concentration camps form part of the exhibition), in a war where the British were indisputable moral -as well as actual- winners, they do so within a narrative of an uninterrupted linear past and present, where past heroes are present heroes, past sacrifice is present sacrifice, past glory is present glory, and past power is present power. The city, town and village war memorials scattered around Great Britain provide a setting for national and personal remembrance, with names of the fallen inscribed in stone or metal, eliciting powerful emotional responses of grief and pride, as well as a sense of recognition of service, of courage and of self-sacrifice. Yet within this militarist triangle of Armed Forces, Morality and Power, memory has little chance of being accurate, when the British remember their wars and the dead.

## Conclusion

'Remember!' history books, war memorials and museums tell us. Remember our ancestors, our brave warriors, our victories and our defeats, our brave nation with its unique qualities and traditions, our land made sacred by the bones of those who came -and fell- before us. Remember too those who made us suffer, those 'others' who may still stake a claim to what is ours and to our freedom.

In Poland, the main concerns of memory politics are national freedom and tradition, understood as the defense of the highest interests and values, with freedom and independence being inalienable imponderables. Memory politics is being implemented as a result of an internal

---

[94] Iraq Body Count, 'A Dossier of Civilian Casualties 2003-2005', last modified 19 July 2005, https://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/reference/pdf/a_dossier_of_civilian_casualties_2003-2005.pdf.
[95] Imogen Piper and Joe Dyke, 'Tens of thousands of civilians likely killed by US in "Forever Wars" ', Airwars, last modified 6 September 2021, https://airwars.org/investigations/tens-of-thousands-of-civilians-likely-killed-by-us-in-forever-wars/.
[96] George Schopflin and Geoffrey Hosking eds, *Myths and Nationhood* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 1997).

debate about the role of the state in relation to history. Some suggest that the state should actively build a community around 'tradition', understood as a set of elements used to identify the national community: rituals, symbols, and founding myths and heroes. Opponents suggest that the state should simply provide a framework for independent scholarly debate, integrity of research and education, rather than interfere in the process of creating a historical narrative. This debate can be seen as an expression of a desire to reassess the role of the state and national interpretations of history, after a period of historical propaganda by right-wing and communist leaders in the 20th century. The Polish narrative of the struggle for freedom or independence is primarily a narrative of victims. It concerns the struggle for sovereignty during the partitions of 1795–1918, the struggle during the First and Second World Wars, and the resistance to communism.

In contrast, British national memories are filled with narratives of victors, of power and of never-ending glory. Defined by a long-standing and enduring military culture, the British remember their military victories, the courage of their sodiers -past and present- and their noble achievements, all the way to the 21st century. The 'marriage' of militarism, religion and power is seen in thousands of memorials and museums around the country, perpetuating myths of ancestry, national purity, courage, heroism, the golden age of empire and the 'glorious' dead. Cultural memory is formulated by 'remembering' a glorious past and incorporating it into an equally glorious present. The heroes of the First and Second World Wars are no different, in nationalist narratives, from the 'heroes' of Britain's 21st century wars of imperialism in the Middle East. Their victims -the tens of thousands of men, women and children injured, tortured and killed in airstrikes, bombings, shelling, shootings and in detention centres- are not remembered. Unlike Poland, the military culture of the UK means that there is no real opposition to this creation of national memory by the state, with the exception of 'opponents' in the form of academics and peace researchers, such as the Iraq Body Count, Every Casualty, Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and the Action on Armed Violence casualty monitors.

Regarding the war dead, the Polish memory narrative encompasses civilian victims of Nazi and Soviet occupation (e.g. Gestapo Detention Center at Aleja Szucha 25, Pawiak Prison, Museum Piasnica Museum in Wejcherów, The Palmiry Museum), victims of the concentration camp system (e.g. Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sobibor, Belzec, Sztutowo), victims of civilian and armed resistance (e.g. Warsaw Uprising Museum, Second World War Museum in Gdansk) and also prisoners of war (The Katyn Museum). Those are victims also commemorated in the UK, and they are commemorated as part of a social-humanitarian historical narrative highlighting how catastrophic war is for civilians, leading not only to death and injury, but also to separation, family breakdown, loss of property, poverty and suffering. There is a deliberate move away from anonymity, in favor of individualization and personalization of war victims, aimed at creating powerful emotional reactions.

In Georgia too, war casualties are a significant part of national identity building, and for the construction of national narratives and myths that serve as emotive influential tools for sustaining nationalism. Historicopolitical memories tell stories of national survival and resistance to oppression. The nation's enemies are remembered, the threats to its security, in the face of further and ongoing threats by the Russians/Soviets, and used to highlight the

importance of a permanent resistance to preserve Georgia's independence and sovereignty. Those memories play a particularly important role during election campaigns, in the context of Georgia's geopolitcal insecurities and strategic interests.

Through memory politics, the past is created as a basis for identity and for 'othering'. In Britain's case, it also becomes a basis for national nostalgia. National memory-makers contruct narratives of inherited wisdom, courage, virtue and superiority, that help uphold a lingering military romanticism. Cooper wrote of a 'cultural bias that upholds Western military culture and its own brand of imperialism'.[97].

The role of a national past is to construct identity through notions of authenticity and continuity; while doing so, the past itself is given a new meaning. Past conflicts are made to fit present perceptions of oneself and of others, and at the same time present conflicts are understood in light of the nation's past, in a circular causal relationship. As a result, in the words of David Carr, 'the individual's self-understanding of himself passes through history,'[98] as the community the individual inhabits organises itself in relation to the rest of the world and projects itself over time, composing and re-composing its autobiography. Populating many of those pages are the dead, remembered with pride, with sadness, or with a sense of understanding, and never with shame.

[97] Randolf G.S. Cooper, The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India (Cambridge: Canbridge University Press, 2023), 4.
[98] David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 69.