Tales from the Past: The Battle over Clio in Estonia and Georgia in the Post-Soviet Era

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“I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night. Let me think. Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is ‘Who in the world am I?’ Ah, that’s the great puzzle!”

― Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

Section I: Introduction and Background

During the early years of the Soviet Union, the Communist party - in a remarkable feat of skillful propaganda, astute politicking, and timely opportunism - created a history of mankind and a united vision for the bright future that resonated with myriad of private stories, from the snowy slopes of Elbrus to the sunny steppes of Central Asia. Suddenly, as the lyrics of one popular Soviet song described it, all private aspects of human activity—including individual memories and narratives—were expected to yield to the supreme mission “of the joint will...[and] common fight for happiness” of the centralizing Soviet regime. The resounding and unexpected collapse of the Soviet juggernaut left behind economies in shambles, crumbled political systems, and people bereft of the centralized system of meaning, confused and often incapable of making sense of the contradicting legacies of Communism, those stubbornly lingering ghosts of the past—the “shifting myths” and (mis)-memories of the bygone era (Judt, 2002; 2005).

In addition to the double-transition problems of democratization and marketization experienced by transitioning countries in Southern Europe (Gunther, 1992; Stephens, 1989; Karl, 1995), these newly emerged former Soviet states also faced the unwieldy tasks of institution-building and nation-building, with little or no experiences of independence (Bunce, 1995; Kuzio, 2001). Nation-building became a particularly challenging task given that the new states inherited populations divided along multiple lines of ethnicity, language, territory, social capital, ideology, and conflicting memories of the already divisive past. Of the aforementioned challenges, these “history wars”—clashing narratives over the interpretation of the past—presented a particularly poignant obstacle for nation-building by forming further rifts in the already divided public opinion about the nation’s past and future, (Crawford, Liphart, 1995) indicative of the fact that the “mental deconstruction [of the Soviet

1 Giorgi Abramov “Song of Unity.”
2 The importance of shared memory for national cohesion has been questioned by some political theorists who argue that the relationship between state and society is that of a purely utilitarian and contractual nature (Locke, Rousseau, Rawles), where the presence of unifying memory narrative is unnecessary for commanding loyalty. The alternative approach, described in works by such scholars as Durkheim, Tocqueille, Gellner and Smith emphasizes that state-society relationships also encompass a non-contractual, “pre-modern” and “pre-market”
Union] …remained an ongoing process” (Beissinger, 1993). The educational sphere, and schools in particular, given their inherent institutional potential to shape the views of youth — a prominent part of the population— became the primary stage for the clash of different societal and state views on history and statehood. How should the divisive history be taught? What should be mentioned about the more controversial periods in history? How (if at all) should the splintered views engage with each other? These pressing questions presented a challenge to the newly emerged states, resulting in divergent nation-building patterns of their respective memory politics.

Introducing the Case Studies: This divergence in memory politics is examined in this paper through the case studies of two former Soviet states—Estonia and Georgia—that found themselves embroiled in tumultuous history “crusades” in their quests for new national identities following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As countries with small populations, situated in geostrategic locations with strategic maritime routes, similar geopolitical loyalties, and a shared historical legacy of frequent dominations and conquests by great powers, these nations share many similarities. This similarity in political histories, yet divergent outcomes in the development of memory politics make these two countries a particularly appealing choice for an instructive comparison. As former member republics of the Soviet Union, they enjoyed a greater degree of political and cultural independence than the majority of other former communist republics during the Soviet rule and were the first ones to call for their respective secessions from the Union in the late 80s (Bennich-Bjorkman, 2007; de Waal, 2010). Finally, after the collapse of the Communist system, both states faced populations divided across different cleavage lines in their interpretation of history: ethno-linguistic divisions in memory narratives in Estonia and pronounced generational divisions in history interpretations in Georgia. These contestations of history in the educational realm, however, took a different form: while in both cases the states attempted to impose their own vision of history onto the curriculum, the two countries witnessed very different responses on the grassroots level. During its early period of transition (1987-1997) Estonia witnessed the mushrooming of public spaces in the form of non-governmental organizations that brought together teachers, public activists, and state representatives together to discuss the divergent views on national history (especially, the controversial periods of the newest history) and the way it should be taught; while in Georgia (2003-2013), the splintered narratives actors in the educational sphere stayed atomized and separate.

For a suitable comparison, I select the following timeframes for my analysis of Estonia’s and Georgia’s early transitional mnemonic politics: 1987-1997 for Estonia and 2003-2013 for Georgia. While both countries regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia suffered a civil war and two territorial conflicts, resulting in a delayed period of transition until the Rose Revolution in 2003. Since 2003, however, Georgia’s political and economic trajectories have closely resembled Estonia’s early period of transition in the 90s.

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Research Question Relevance: Why are splintered memories handled differently during political and economic transitions? Why do some societies tackle their contested pasts via conversations in public spheres—spaces, distinct from the market and the state, for private individuals to come together as a public to discuss issues of public relevance—while others do not? Why are some of these mnemonic public spheres more grassroots-driven, while others more state-led? Exploring these questions is valuable for two reasons: first, while nation-building/identity politics have been a prominent subject in political science on transitions for over two decades, the question of memory politics has been largely absent from the literature (often relegated to the realm of anthropology or cultural studies).4 Those political science works that investigated memory politics have several shortcomings: 1) lack of a comparative aspect (focusing, more commonly, on a single case study); 2) not providing a more generalizable framework that could be applied to investigate the patterns of memory politics in states across different regions experiencing significant systemic political transitions; and 3) paying disproportionate attention to the role of the state as the main locus of collective memory production, neglecting the mnemonic practices on the grassroots level and their interaction with the state. This work will address these methodological shortcomings through a comparative analysis of the grassroots level memory politics in the educational realm.

Second, in light of the continued prominence of history wars and the former Communist states’ infatuation with history (almost 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet system), a more nuanced study of the patterns of memory debates is both timely and instructive for examining the dynamics of political transition from a fresh perspective. While the precise relationship between the politics of collective memory debates and democratization process have not been systematically investigated in the literature on state-building and memory-politics, a cursory review of various states-in-transition suggests that states which develop an open political model and a democratic regime—such as Germany, Spain, Poland—also witness a more active dialogue and an open public space between the splintered historical narratives already during the early stages of transition5. This correlation between the nature of historical identity debates and its future political system is not surprising: it is reasonable to assume that the degree to which a public space is open to different identity

4 Some of the accounts that offer a more generalizable, comparative framework for the study of collective memory politics (albeit with the focus on the state memory politics) in Central/Eastern Europe and Latin America are: Michael Bernhardt and Jan Kubík’s “Twenty Years After Communism: Politics of Memory and Commemoration” (Oxford University Press, 2014) and De Brito, Alexandra Barahona, Carmen González Enriquez, and Paloma Aguilar, eds., “The Politics of Memory and Democratization: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies” (Oxford University Press, 2001).

5 Each of the three states mentioned above witnessed widespread public debates about different controversial periods of their respective national histories. These included: World War II for Germany/the legacy of Communism for East Germany; the Civil War in the case of Spain; and the Holocaust/Polish-German relationship for Poland.
discourses is reflective of the degree of respect a state and its residents hold for the pluralism of opinions—a prerequisite for establishing a functioning democracy. Further, a public space that is more open to the discussion of divisive identity lines already early on during the transition is more likely to serve as a metaphorical “agora”, thereby facilitating dialogue between actors with different views, and thus, fostering a more democratic climate. If the dynamics of identity debates during watershed moments in history indeed matter for the nature of the ensuing political model, it is therefore valuable to move beyond a descriptive paradigm—prevalent in the recent two decades of literature on identity politics—and to study the memory/historical identity debates in a more systematic manner.

The divergence in the patterns of historical memory debates is characterized here by 1) the degree to which these debates are state or civil society-driven; 2) the degree of openness of the mnemonic public sphere(s) to the plurality of opinions/alternative historical narratives; and 3) the degree of dialectic between different actors with different views on history. To identify the factors influencing the patterns of historical identity debates and the spaces wherein these debates take place, I reference the literature concerning civil society, with a particular focus on public spheres. These factors are: 1) the formation of a vocal literati middle class; 2) the state’s disposition towards public spheres (as determined by state capacity); 3) institutional memory of prior associational life; and 4) belonging, or the prospect of belonging to the external “moral community” that requires adopting a more pluralist approach to the collective past. Using Georgia and Estonia as case studies, I argue that the presence and/or the degree of instantiation of these variables are instrumental for understanding the different patterns of mnemonic polemics in states undergoing significant political transitions. Given the importance of education as a primary stage for shaping a society’s relationship with its past (Zerubavel, 1995), my arguments are substantiated by a systematic examination of the historical memory debates (or the lack thereof) within the educational realms of Estonia and Georgia during their respective early transitional periods. In addition to the review of primary and secondary literature, the data collection for this paper is based on the archival research I have conducted in Estonia and Georgia, as well as qualitative and quantitative data from over 110 standardized interviews with history teachers, NGO leaders, intellectuals, and politicians conducted over the course of 5 months of fieldwork in 2013.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I define the key terms employed in this paper: civil society, public sphere, mnemonic sphere, and the metrics that are used to characterize the degree of openness of mnemonic public spheres. I briefly review literature on political transitions and memory debates. I also discuss factors in the literature that have been previously suggested to influence memory politics, and then
propose a range of alternative structural and institutional variables to explain the divergence in the patterns of collective memory debates in different societies that experienced significant political and economic transformations. In the second section, I describe the memory politics in Estonia and Georgia by looking at the narratives of one of the most contested periods for both countries—the memories of the Soviet period—and how these debates were handled in the educational realm. I apply metrics developed in the first section to describe mnemonic public spheres in both cases. Finally, in the third section, I apply the variables identified in the theoretical section of the paper to explain the divergence in patterns of identity contestation in Estonia and Georgia. I conclude with thoughts on public space and identity politics of the post-Soviet space and the relevance of these cases for other transitional states.

Section II: Theories of Memory Politics, Public Space, and Democratic State-Building

The literature on democracy-building and memory-politics is divided between those scholars who believe that dealing with one’s past is a requirement for democracy-building, and those who argue that public debates on collective memory will only subvert democratic development. Proponents of the former approach argue that dealing with the “ghosts” of the past is essential, as it allows the state to address any past wrongdoings and start with a clean slate (Weschler, 1990), to avoid the dangers of past crimes (Adorno, 1986) and institutionalist mistakes (Deutsch, 1963), while drawing on the known historical remedies and political continuities (Hobsbawm, 1993). By contrast, those who oppose digging out proverbial “skeletons in the closet” during times of political and economic transitions, argue that social amnesia is significantly more useful for democracy building, as it allows a society to start afresh without inherited resentment (Hobbes, 1967; Rawls, 1993; Holmes, 1988; Renann, 1882). As these authors argue, sorting through different memories can bring threats to national cohesion and self-image, thus increasing the costs of cooperation and causing moral damage to civil society (ibid.). Others, like Heller (2001) and Markus (2001) assert that society, like the markets, does not even require memory and can achieve purposeful cooperation on an ad hoc basis.

In this paper, however, I adopt the view that what matters for democracy’s health is not the act of remembering or forgetting per se, but rather the way in which the past is remembered or forgotten⁶. When the nature of memory narratives is characterized by closure and permanent inscription, without communicative

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⁶ A similar view is expressed by Barbara Misztal in “Memory and Democracy”. America Behavioral Scientist, 2005.
action between divergent narratives, there is a significant chance of clashing between such agents with diverging memories when they become apparent to each other—especially if the memories are concerned with traumatic and contested events (Josipovici, 98). By contrast, an open-ended, non-fixed collective memory/collective amnesia occurs when there is an open social space, which, allows for Habermasian “communicative action” to take place, resulting in a more critical approach to deciding on whether and how to forget or remember (Risse, 2000). The next subsection describes the public spaces analyzed in this work and outlines a metric used here to gauge the degree of openness of these mnemonic public spheres.

Defining Key Terms

Civil Societies and Public Spheres: Civil society is defined here as the public realm of autonomous, non-state formed, voluntary associations that serve as an intermediary between the state, market, and private individuals, and, while acting collectively, assume a political program without the intention to usurp the power of the state (Fish, 1995; Schmitter, 1995; Taylor, 1990; Cohen and Arato, 1992). Civil society pursues and actualizes this agenda through participation in public spheres, which are defined here as discursive spaces for members of civil society (and occasionally non-civil society actors, if the latter do not employ this opportunity to dominate the civil society discourse) to engage in public debate/dialogue and act on a variety of issues of greater social significance (Habermas, 1962; Fraser, 1990; Kumar, 1993; Schmitter, 1995). Importantly, despite the expectation to act collectively, civil societies are not inherently monolithic, reflective of the diverse views and interests of different groups that comprise it; in fact, “the logic of consensus and unity is less important than is the willingness of the civil society actors to compromise and negotiate, and in so doing, regulate conflicts.” (Reinhardt, 2006) It is specifically this manner of how the “difference and distinction” are addressed, whether through exclusionary means or through “non-violence, tolerance, self-discipline”—known as zivilgesellschaftlichkeit—that defines the nature of the civil society (ibid).

Defining and Measuring Mnemonic Public Spheres: This paper explores mnemonic public spheres—a type of public sphere that emerges in response to the society’s need to address questions of memory/history.

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7 The original view of civil society and public sphere perceived these concepts as juxtaposing the despotic state (Ferguson, 1767; Hegel, 1820; Habermas, 1962; Havel, 1994). This work, however subscribes to the notion that civil society is a concept in constant flux, with changing meanings and relationships that are contingent on historical circumstances. Following the collapse of the Communist regime, the relationship between some civil societies and states became increasingly interconnected, with some states assisting civil societies by creating an amenable legal framework, while also relying on the civil society to deliver some of the services the state could not provide (Diamond, 1994; Waltzer, 1992; Skocpol, 1985). These changes remind us to be more cautious about viewing the state-civil society relationship as zero-sum. A similar consideration suggests revisiting our understanding of the public sphere, which has been traditionally viewed as a domain of civil society alone, by asking whether the state (as well as other non-civil society actors, such as the market and the church) has a place and to what extent in the public space.
While mnemonic public spheres can take different forms (civil society organized historical commemorations/parades/protests, construction of monuments, formation of independent historical organizations dedicated to celebrating/demonizing a particular historical period/figure, etc.), I choose to focus on alternative mnemonic public spheres in the educational realm: those non-state-run spaces comprised of non-governmental organizations and media outlets that are dedicated to the subject of history education in schools. In most transitional regimes, history curricula for public schools—given the ideological value it holds for the state—is largely state controlled, usually offering a very particular (often one-sided) outlook on history and its controversial periods. The non-governmental associations and non-state-run media outlets that address history teaching/learning in public education system thus have a potential to serve as important mnemonic venues for diverging historical narratives—namely, those of history teachers, public activists and state representatives—to engage with each other, as well as respond to, critique, and even impact the state curriculum. The table below demonstrates what measurements are used to describe these mnemonic public spheres, the scope and nature of their activities, and the degree of their openness. These categories are applied in the following section to describe the mnemonic public spheres in Estonia and Georgia.

**Table 1: Parameters for Describing Mnemonic Spheres**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Data Sources and Measurements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of Mnemonic Public Spheres</strong></td>
<td>1) Number of non-governmental associations whose mission is (directly or indirectly) concerned with history education within schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2) Membership rates for these associations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Scope of Activities Within Mnemonic Spaces</strong></td>
<td>Instantiations of activity (i.e. publications, seminars on teaching techniques, actual discussion of historical periods, discussion forums, distributing teaching-related resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusivity of the Mnemonic Spheres</strong></td>
<td>1) Are controversial history periods discussed?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2) Through what venues are they discussed?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3) Who are the agents participating in these discussions?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4) Are any agents subscribing to particular narratives/interpretations excluded from the discourse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources of data: content analysis of archival documents and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
formal interviews with history teachers and NGO leaders

| Political Leverage of the Mnemonic Spheres | Can mnemonic spheres project their views to a political level Through participation in: a) curriculum b) textbook c) exam writing d) state education committees Sources of data: Ministry of Education records and interviews with state officials involved in the writing of history curriculum and the NGO members |

**Why Are Some Mnemonic Public Spheres in States in Transition More Open than Others?** While no systematic work has been done on the conditions influencing the nature and openness of historical debates during the times of political transition, three factors have been suggested as influential in determining the degree of openness of a mnemonic public sphere: economic stability, timing (i.e. the period of time that elapses between the happening of the controversial historical period and its public discussion) and the presence of political and legal mechanisms that are protective of and conducive to the freedom of association.

- **Economic Stability:** One variable that has been suggested to allow societies to engage in collective memory discussions is the presence of a stable economy. The data from World Values Survey (Inglehart, 1997) implies that economic development tends to bring a shift from focusing on survival to self-expression, which helps to explain why richer societies are more likely to engage in discursive practices. Shevel (2011) echoes this postulate in her work comparing memory politics in Ukraine and Spain, suggesting that the partial reason why the latter could afford the discussion of the controversial Francoist period (as reflected in the pluralistic nature of both the Law on Historical Memory of 2007, as well as multiple grassroots initiatives to discuss this historical period), was due to Spain’s economic stability, which in turn made the conversation on diverging collective memory possible.

While this is a salient argument, the presence of this variable alone does not always correlate with more open mnemonic spheres. For instance, some economically developed countries (whether measured in terms of GDP, ranking on the human development index, or level of industrialization), such as Israel or Turkey, did not witness the emergence of more pluralistic mnemonic spheres - especially in educational setting - that fostered an awareness of alternative collective memory narratives, or, even less so, allowed for the communicative action between the different narratives to happen (Yildirim, 2006; Simsek, 2009; Al-Haj, 2005; Yogev, 2009). Similarly, if the argument about the level of economic development holds, one would expect to see the adverse effect of low economic growth on the level of
pluralism in identity debates. The case studies of Estonia (1987-1997) and Georgia (2003-2013), analyzed here, however, suggest that countries with very similar levels of economic development can pursue very different mnemonic policies in the educational realm (see Figure 1). This incongruity in the relationship between economic development and the degree of openness of mnemonic spheres suggests that alternative factors are at work.

**Figure 1**

[Diagram showing economic development in Georgia (2003-2013) and Estonia (1987-1997).]

*Note on the graph:* World Bank data was used to plot Georgia’s GDP ppp over the years of transition. Data points for Estonia (1993-1997) were also derived from the WB databank. While no data on GDP ppp was available for Estonia (1987-1992), I plotted the data points by dividing the available GDP for 1990-1992\(^8\) from the Statistics Division of the United Nations (no accurate data is available from the earlier Soviet period, 1987-1989) by the total population for each respective year (data obtained from the official government agency Statistics Estonia).

- **How much time should elapse?** Other scholars have looked closely at the time elapsed between the occurrence of the event and its subsequent discussion in mnemonic spheres, arguing that the longer the period of time that has passed between a controversial historical epoch/event and its discussion, the more conducive the social climate is to the emergence of more pluralistic memory spheres. With time, the urgency to come to terms with history (whether through intentional remembering or forgetting) wanes, as fewer direct victims remain to demand justice and call for the reinvestigation of history (Przeworski, 1988; Aguilar, 2001; De Brito, 2010). A comparative study of collective memory debates in Chile and Spain suggest that Spain had a more conducive environment for launching nationwide discussions of the Francoist period because of the time elapsed—several decades of independence—between the discussion

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of contested memories of the civil war and the repressive event. In the case of Chile, however, the transitional administration launched the discussion of Pinochet’s regime while the memories of political repression were still fresh and the divisions between social groups were too strong to engage in communicative action with other narratives (Aguilar and Hite, 2004).

While this argument is intuitive, how should one apply it to the understanding of mnemonic spheres? What is the metric for determining the time sufficiently elapsed that would make an environment (and in particular, educational environment) more favorable for a discussion of the ghosts of the past: the number of years, or the quality/presence of structural/institutional changes in the country? Further, why do some countries witness greater multi-perspectivity in historical discourses much earlier than others (case in point is East Germany, where school history educators attempted to create a more open space through history curriculum for a discussion of Communist past, less than a decade after the separation from the Communist bloc. See Ahonen, 1997; 2001). Similarly, the effect of the “time elapsed” variable is unclear in the case of the two countries studied in this paper—Estonia and Georgia; both exited the Soviet Union at the same time; yet, contrary to the case of Georgia, the civil society in Estonia pursued the creation of spaces in the educational realm to discuss the controversial past early on during its transition. In short, while the “time elapsed” factor may be significant, it requires further contextualization.

• **Laws and Institutions:** Given their influences on the degree of state accountability, free speech, and right to associate, the nature of laws and institutions as political mechanisms are other variables that have been discussed in the literature on democratic memory politics (De Brito, et. al, 2001). Stipulations within these political institutions—such as the status of libel laws or laws determining the ease of registration of non-government entities and their ability to procure funding – can impact both the scope/agenda of non-state organizations that aspire to serve as an alternate space for history discussions (Diego and Alonso, 2011)\(^9\). However, while these mechanisms can facilitate the formation of mnemonic public spheres, they do not directly determine whether: 1) these mnemonic spheres will witness an active discourse, since the laws, especially in states-in-transition, can be implemented selectively\(^10\); or, 2) whether the mnemonic space

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\(^9\) These conditions that are applied here to explain the dynamics of mnemonic public spheres are examples of structural factors that are commonly identified as important for the presence of a favorable climate for civil societies in general. For a more expansive list of other conditions see: Green, Andrew T. "Comparative development of post-Communist civil societies." *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.3 (2002): 455-471;

will be pluralistic. The two case studies discussed in this paper are a case-in-point of states developing different mnemonic spheres, despite having a fairly advanced environment for NGO work, characterized by the presence of legal frameworks that simplified procedures for opening, registering, and operating an NGO (Report on the First Decade of NGO climate in Estonia, Center for Civil Society, 2003; Lagerspetz, 2002; USAID NGO sustainability Index report 2006-2011 for Georgia)

While these three factors likely have a role in shaping the mnemonic landscape, given the aforementioned issues regarding the causal direction of these variables and/or issues related to their measurement, I suggest including several additional variables to explain the divergence in mnemonic spheres. These include: (1) state capacity (2) institutional memories of prior associational life (3) belonging/prospect of belonging to moral community, and (4) the emergence of a vocal literati middle class that remains autonomous from the state. These variables contribute towards developing a more comprehensive model for understanding mnemonic dynamics in school settings in states in transition, and will be examined here in the case of both Georgia and Estonia.

Section III: Background and Fieldwork Results in History Education Reforms in Estonia and Georgia

**Estonia: Singing the Song of the Revolution**

**State Discourse:** After nearly fifty years of Soviet rule, the wave of peaceful mass protest movements, rallies, and boycotts that came to be known as the “Singing Revolution” swept through Estonia between 1987-1991. Questions of national identity and history became a central theme in public debates (Ruutsoo, 1995). History education in schools, in particular, became a hotly contested subject (Wulf and Gronholm, 2010). While the Soviet narrative in textbooks de-emphasized 19th century national revival and Estonia’s early independence period, the Estonian state, as reflected in school history curricula, launched on a mission to re-discover the formerly occupied ‘historical truth’ of a primordial nation-state. They emphasized the

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11 Israel and some countries of the Southern Cone (such as Chile and Uruguay) are good examples of states with democratic constitutions and laws favorable to civil associations, yet, had short-lived mnemonic spheres inclusive of non-mainstream narratives in the educational realm. See Naveh, Eyal. "Public uproar over the history curriculum and textbooks in Israel." *Contemporary public debates over history education* 6 (2010): 133-151; Magendzo, Abraham, and María Isabel Toledo and Renato Gazmuri. "Teaching recent history in countries that have experienced human rights violations: Case studies from Chile." *Perspectives in Education* 29.2 (2011): 19-27; as well as De Brito, Alexandra Barahona. *Human rights and democratization in Latin America: Uruguay and Chile.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
narrative of a constantly endangered nation by the invasion of neighboring powers (i.e. Teutonic knights, Baltic Germans, Swedes, Russians, etc.) and a discourse of independence, glorifying ‘freedom fighters’ as far back as the medieval peasants (Ahonen, 2001). The discussions of the Soviet period were especially fraught with tensions: the main state narrative portrayed the Soviet Union (and Russia by extension) as the evil occupant, clashing with the alternative narrative—mostly prominent among the Russian-speaking segments of the populations—arguing that the imposition of the Soviet regime was partially initiated by Estonian socialist workers (Wertsch, 1994). This new state discourse in the curriculum was championed by a coterie of historians-turned-politicians—most notably, the former history teacher-turned-prime-minister Mart Laar. The elite introduced several policies and wrote several history textbooks aimed at restoring the “true history” of Estonia, with a particular emphasis on exposing the crimes of the Soviets in the 40s and the restoration of the memories of the first republic. This narrative, however, left little room for a historical dialogue with the narratives of Estonian native Russian speakers (Ahonen, 1992; Paabo, 2011).

Grassroots Mnemonic Spheres

While the state fostered a particular rendition of history, actors on the grassroots level countervailed this narrative by fostering their own spaces for discussing history and how it should be taught. The following subsections will provide a list of Estonian mnemonic public spheres based on data gathered from interviews, archival research, and secondary documents. Mnemonic spheres are described according to the metrics developed in the earlier theoretical section: 1) scope of mnemonic sphere(s), 2) its activities, 3) inclusivity with respect to other mnemonic spheres, and 4) political leverage on the state (i.e. Ministry of Education and the school history curriculum).

I. Ad Hoc Congresses and Working Groups: As early as 1987, local history teachers started forming various ad hoc associations — both on local and national levels — culminating with an All-History-Teachers Congress in 1988\(^{12}\). Based on the discussions at the Congress, teachers, along with representatives of the intelligentsia developed two versions of history curricula. One of the versions, designed by the teachers and associates of the Education Development Centre, retained some of the existing historical materials from the Soviet period, while also allocating more space in the curriculum to the period of the First Republic to cultivate a national consciousness. They offered materials that were different from the “physically and morally outdated [ESSR views] and [did] not comply ... to the needs of the new programmes ideologically” (qtd in Jurgens, 2013).

\(^{12}\) Most of my interviewees who were working adults during this period participated in the Congress. One congress attendee recounted how the discussions were “almost miraculous...by letting us have a say in the reforms.”
A second group, spearheaded by the associates of the Tallinn Pedagogical University and several NGOs, also adapted the curriculum to include topics previously considered taboo; however, an even greater emphasis was placed both critical reasoning and an open-ended textbook narrative. Importantly, these grassroots efforts later informed the school curricula adopted by the Ministry of Education in 1989-1990. (Ruus, 2004; Kreetzberg, 1998). Russian-speaking history teachers were also a part of the Congress and grassroots efforts. In the words of some of my Russian-speaking interviewees, “the new educational direction at the time was unclear. The changing historical knowledge following the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the need to figure out how to deal with more controversial topics in the post-independence era, as well as the new skillset a history teacher had to learn and a complete lack of clarity in terms of how this was to be achieved, meant that participating in forums, like the all-teachers-congress became the main source of information” (Interviews with history teachers of Russian schools, Tallinn, Estonia, August 2013).

II. Newspapers: These aforementioned ad hoc grassroots initiatives represented only a sliver of the mnemonic public spheres in the educational realm. Newspapers became another particularly attractive venue for discussing different historical narratives, as well as future history curricula. In general, newspapers could be categorized into three groups:

- **Newspapers intended for the Estonian-speaking audience:** Represented by such publications as Õpetajate Leht (Teachers’ Newspaper) with an average print circulation of 3,000-12,000 before its digitization in 1996. While the paper also addressed issues outside of history education, it became a primary forum for history teachers, professional historians, and NGO leaders to voice issues about history education, as well as sharing information about opportunities and resources available for history educators.

- **Mixed-Audience Newspapers:** Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a group of historians from Tartu University attempted to bridge the gap between alternative historical narratives in schools by publishing articles on controversial historical periods and events not discussed previously in the history curriculum in Russian-language newspapers, such as “Vperjod” (Forward) and “Sovetskaya Estonia”

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13 Very similar sentiments were echoed by the teachers-interviewees of a different research project “Civic Education Policy and Practice in Post-Soviet Estonia, from Global to Classroom Practices.” Stevick, Doyle. PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2006.

(Soviet Estonia). As described by Tiit Rosenberg, an organizer of the newspaper, the goal was not only to acquaint the Russian-speaking audience with lesser known histories and alternative perspectives, but also to discuss the challenges of writing textbooks that would both introduce students to the history of the country and the regions where they reside, without marginalizing the narratives of the Russian speakers.  

- **Russian-language Newspapers, Mostly Intended for Russian-Speaking Teachers:** One of the key Russian-language teachers’ publications during the early period of transition was the newspaper “Uchitel” (Teacher), sponsored by the Vene Koolide Õpetajate Ühendus (Russian Teacher’s Association). The period of 1987-1991 came to be known as a “golden era for publishing” for the Russian-speaking communities, with many history teachers voicing their thoughts in newspapers and popular publications (Ponomareva; Khachaturyan, 2012). This forum, in particular, became one of the most active newspapers for Russian-speaking history teachers to discuss their respective narratives, as well as the issues and challenges of teaching history post-independence. A content analysis of 25 issues (from 1990 (#12), 1992 (#1-12)-1993 (#1-12)) of this monthly daily yielded the following results (Figure 2):

**Figure 2:**

From the 25 issues described above, I selected 53 articles relevant to historical narratives. The content

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could be clustered into 3 categories: 1) discourses aimed at reconciling local cultural/linguistic identities with the national discourse (25/53 articles); 2) announcements/reports on the opportunities to be involved in the shaping of the educational processes (16/53 articles); and 3) discussions of non-historical identities (religious, spiritual, meaning of homeland/Estonia, what is one relationship to Russia, etc., 12/53 articles).

**Non-Governmental Associations: Scope, Activities, and Inclusivity.** In addition to the aforementioned non-state initiatives, other mnemonic spheres mushroomed by way of several non-governmental organizations, founded by history teachers and public activists (Estonia, along with Hungary, had the highest per capita number of registered non-governmental associations addressing education in the 90s)\(^\text{16}\). These organizations—the most prominent of which were the History Teachers Association and the Jaan Tõnisson Institute—took on a leading role in initiating discussions (in the form of seminars, summer schools, domestic and international conferences), producing publications on more critical and nuanced treatment of controversial history periods in the classroom setting, and providing training and supplementary resources in teaching civics and history. The scope of these activities impacted the majority of history teachers—The Jaan Tõnisson Institute alone claimed to have trained over 80% of history teachers—especially in the subject of civics (*Interview with a Director of the Institute, Tallinn, August 2013*). The History Teachers’ Association became the main source of alternative textbooks—delivered to all Estonian-language and Russian-language schools—addressing controversial questions such as the Holocaust, ‘image of the Other’, World War II, and the establishment of Soviet rule\(^\text{17}\). The majority of Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking teachers became members of the association.

In the early transitional years, interest in membership in these organizations was motivated by three factors: first, the wide-spread perceptions of these organizations as the only source of much-needed information, resources, and second, a feeling of professional solidarity in the early years of the post-Soviet chaos that served as an incentive for teachers to join forces vis-à-vis these associations(*Interview with several history teachers from Russian-language schools, Tallinn, August, 2013*). The third reason in the growth in membership of the History Teachers’ Association was an outcome of a timely collaboration of this organization with Tallinn’s Pedagogical University—one of the two institutions training history teachers— which resulted in recruiting the young teachers while they were still receiving their training (*Interview with Mare Oja, founder of the


\(^\text{17}\) More information on the association’s activities, see: [http://www.eays.edu.ee/aja/index.php/partnerid/eustory](http://www.eays.edu.ee/aja/index.php/partnerid/eustory). On additional activities conducted by the association in conjunction with All-European-History-Teachers’ Association, see: [http://euroclio.eu](http://euroclio.eu) and [http://eustory.org](http://eustory.org)
Association, Tallinn, August 2013). Attendance of the activities organized by the association during the early period of transition was especially high\(^\text{18}\), and a particular effort was made to encourage the participation of the Russian-speaking teachers (ibid.; interview with Russian-speaking history teachers, Tartu, Estonia, August 2013; Toots, 1997). In addition to participating in these associations, Russian-speaking teachers formed a separate organization (referenced earlier)—Vene Koolide Õpetajate Ühendus\(^\text{19}\) (Association of Teachers from Russian Schools) that had an average of 200 members. History teachers who belonged to this group organized several conferences in the early 90s, attended by close to 100 politicians, professional historians, public activists, and teachers that discussed how to reconcile clashing historical narratives in the classroom and the textbooks\(^\text{20}\).

**Political Leverage:** The activities of the grassroots mnemonic spheres did not go unnoticed by the relevant state institutions, who were eager to capitalize on these resources and expertise. They recruited teachers (both Estonian and Russian-speaking) and leaders of these organizations to institute changes in the national curriculum. Importantly, joining the Ministry of Education working groups did not curtail or compromise the activities that were taking place among the civil society realm; on the contrary, it provided non-state actors with an opportunity to leverage and upload their interests to the state-level more efficiently (interviews with NGO leaders in Tartu and Tallinn, August, 2013). For instance, these associations lobbied the Ministry of Education and were subsequently granted concessions in the area of textbook production, resulting in the toning down of some of the more atavistic narratives in the textbook that were alienating teachers and students with alternative views on history. Other concessions that were granted by the state (as per these voluntary associations’ requests to make the history learning more open-ended) included: introducing analytical and essay-based questions (in addition to factual ones) to the national final examination (Oja, 2004); and, engaging history teachers from both Estonian- and Russian-language schools in exam and curriculum writing\(^\text{21}\). Finally, in light of the extent of self-organization observed among the history teachers and public activists supporting reforms in history education, state institutions resolved to have no special administrative unit responsible for planning and monitoring professional training of these teachers, effectively relegating these functions to these newly founded voluntary associations (Toots, 1997).

\(^{18}\) Even today an average of 20-25% members of the local chapters of History Teachers Association attend the events regularly (~15/40 teachers in Tartu and 30-40/170 in Tallinn), as per conversations with local chapter heads.

\(^{19}\) http://www.etnoweb.ee/ru/org/6dkki

\(^{20}\) Transcripts of some of the conferences (e.g. June, 1995; Modern Society and the Challenge of Teaching History Conference, May, 1998) proceedings suggest a vibrant discussion between the attendants and are available at the Estonian Pedagogical Archive in Tallinn.

\(^{21}\) Per interviews with Ministry Officials in Tallinn and Tartu, and a Head of the Local Chapter of History Teachers Association in Tallinn, by 2000, almost 70% of all exam writers were teachers.
The ramifications of having such active mnemonic spheres with salient political leverage, was that different historical narratives had an opportunity to come into contact with each other. While historical narratives continued to diverge and be articulated in the classrooms, I have repeatedly noticed in the responses of both my Estonian- and Russian-speaking interviewees a strong sense of awareness of viewpoints different from their own. This awareness was reflected in a popular perception that teachers needed to minimize sources of conflict in the classroom, by giving students a sense as to the origins of alternative narratives and an awareness of several versions of history (interviews in Tartu and Tallinn). The trends observed in my interviews were corroborated by the results of the recently conducted survey performed by Golubeva (2010), which indicated that the teachers felt comfortable both presenting the narratives they might have disagreed with, while bringing in other educational materials that allowed them to pursue a subject from a different angle.

**Georgia on My Mind: Rose Revolution Crusades with Clio**

**State Discourse:** Georgia, similar to Estonia and other post-Communist states, faced a nation-building conundrum after the collapse of the Soviet Union. How should its historical trajectory be understood? How should it teach about history—especially, concerning more recent and controversial periods of the Soviet Union—to a new generation of Homo post-soveticus? During the first decade of independence, the unraveling chaos of the civil war and two bloody conflicts with the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however, showed that the present was more important than the past, thus pushing the question of history teaching to the backburner for much of the 90s (Reisner, 1998). In 2003, however, there was a dramatic regime change following a wave of protests (in response to the fraud in the parliamentary elections results) that became popularly known as the ‘Rose Revolution’. These protests brought about the final rupture with the Soviet regime, vis-à-vis the ousting of Georgia’s president, Eduard Shevardnadze—a former Secretary of Georgia’s Communist Party and the Minister of the Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. Georgia’s new government—headed by Mikheil Saakashvili, a self-described ‘Westernized reformer’ and “a builder of a nation-state [just like] [Kemal] Ataturk and [David] Ben-Gurion”22—was keen on transforming the country and the national mentality23. The educational sphere became one of the primary venues for enacting this ‘new mentality’. History teaching, in particular, came to be viewed as an auspicious realm for molding new citizens. The new approach towards history, captured in the Education Law of 2005, was described as a shift toward establishing a multi-perspective approach toward history and Georgian statehood, by strengthening the civil

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consciousness, developing critical thinking skills, and integrating the Georgian history into the context of the world narrative (Standard, 2005; Standard, 2011). Unlike the previous government, Saakashvili’s team had committed itself to creating a centralized national curriculum—an unprecedented act in the period of Georgia’s short independence.

Despite the veneer of a more civic-minded, scientific, and multi-perspective view of the Georgian history that was proclaimed in the curriculum, a careful examination of textbooks, the President’s speeches and state organized educational commemoration events revealed a narrative that was often-times one-sided, with a clear delineation of ‘the good’ and ‘the evil’. Similar to the Estonian state, the Georgian state offered a markedly partial treatment of two historical periods of the national history-- the short-lived periods of independence (1918-1921) and the 70-year Soviet rule—as reflected in the curriculum. First-hand review of seven school textbooks suggest that these two historical periods came to be described as convenient reference points for an example of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ state-building respectively, demonizing or dismissing the possibility of alternative narratives and leaving little room in the curriculum for a critical discussion of these periods, their causes, and the actors involved. While the Standard calls for “the deconstruction of the ideas and concepts,” (Standard, 2011) the portrayal of these two historical periods in the textbooks offer a view that is less conducive to alternative interpretations, much less to “deconstruction.” (Kakitelashvili, 2009; Chikovani, 2010; Shatirishvili, 2009; Toria, 2012; Kitaevich, 2014).

**Typology of Grassroots Mnemonic Discourses Among the Teachers:** Similar to Estonia, the narratives on the grassroots level in the Georgian classrooms were internally divided and distinct from the state narrative. Yet, in contrast to Estonia, there was little effort to systematically study—both by the state and local academics/public activists—the narratives presented by teachers in the classroom; and, in particular, how the more controversial periods of early independence and the Soviet epoch were taught. Given the paucity of previously collected data, in an attempt to identify these narratives I conducted 69 structured interviews in Russian and Georgian with history teachers from 29 schools. Over the course of fourteen weeks split between December, 2012, January and May-July, 2013, I visited 15% of all Tbilisi-based public schools, representing all five districts with varying socio-economic and ethnic compositions. The interviewees discussed their views on the changes in history education and their approach toward teaching history. The data revealed a predominance of four narratives, conditioned by their respective generational cleavages (Kitaevich, 2014). Here, I employ the term “generation” to denote a social group formed in response to shared cultural and socio-political experiences and values -- in contradistinction to a more limiting meaning of “generation”, referring to individuals from the same age cohorts (Davis, 1979). The summary of the four narratives are summarized in Table 2:
Table 2: Key Elements in the 4 Main Historical Discourses of the Georgian Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>What is considered important in studying national history?</th>
<th>The View of the Soviet Union</th>
<th>Views on Georgia and the World</th>
<th>Views on Teaching History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culturalist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=13</td>
<td>Soviet-style historiography—stressing the <strong>autochthonous origins</strong> of the proto-State; mythologizing national origins. E.g., portraying Georgia as the land of the golden fleece</td>
<td>While the regime is often criticized, many select elements—economic and political stability—are extolled; Stalin is widely admired for his iron-fist authority</td>
<td>Emphasis on world cultures and civilizations (mostly ancient, in line with the fascination with proto-states), where Georgia occupies a separate niche</td>
<td>There is a true version of history, and a teacher ought to be a guardian of it, teaching it through ‘indisputable’ facts, rather than quarrelsome discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hybrid</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=24</td>
<td>Stressing the medieval period of kings (7th-13th centuries) when Georgia was a “light to the nations”</td>
<td>Similar to above</td>
<td>While the world history is considered fairly important, the argument is made that Georgian history is exceptional and should be studied in greater depth, while the global history can be studied as background to contextualize Georgian history</td>
<td>History lessons should be moralistic in nature, meant to instill personal values, integrity, and spirituality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iconoclast</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=20</td>
<td>Wariness of authority figures (given the firsthand experience with the dissolution of one political system and the bloody start of the post-Soviet era); deconstructing romanticized history figures; focus on 19th-20th century political history</td>
<td>Soviet period is viewed and eagerly taught as a prime example of societies succumbing to the cult of personality</td>
<td>View Western political model favorably</td>
<td>History teaching is viewed as a venue for debating politics; emphasis on regime discussions, civics, debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children of Perestroika</strong></td>
<td>History is viewed as a platform for reclaiming lost values and authentic culture. Focus on the early period of Christianity and romantic</td>
<td>Reluctant to talk about the Soviet past (most teachers also demonstrate little/superficial interest in the history of “more”</td>
<td>Less-favorable view of the West as the potential threat to culture and religion; greater interest in the history of “more”</td>
<td>Cultivation of patriotic values; teaching about heroes and instilling respect for the Church and cultural values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Born before the collapse of Communism but educated mostly in the tumultuous 90s and the early 2000 period, perceive it as a stigma that should be forgotten; SU is either demonized or mostly ignored in the classroom setting.

*Mnemonic Spheres:* Similar to Estonia, then, Georgia witnessed a proliferation of mnemonic narratives in the educational realm, diverging in their visions of certain historical periods and the nature/role of history teaching. Unlike the Estonian case, however, these splintered narratives did not coalesce in organized spaces; rather, they remained atomized. Interaction with each other (even between teachers with similar narratives) was notably limited. Among my interviewees -- teachers, NGO leaders, and Ministry of Education officials -- there was little awareness about alternative narratives, or their understanding of alternative narratives was grotesquely exaggerated and distorted. In fact, the teachers who participated in my focus groups often described the event as the only opportunity for them to come together to discuss both pedagogy and history, despite being in the same district, or even the same school.

Several mnemonic spaces, such as history publications and voluntary associations dedicated to the study of history, were present in Georgia during the period examined in this paper (2003-2013); however, their ability to stimulate an active discussion between the agents with different narratives and/or impact the state vision of how history should be taught was rather limited. Each attempt at initiating a public mnemonic sphere in the educational realm and its shortcomings are discussed below.

- **Voluntary Associations:** Similar to Estonia, Georgia, too, had its own chapter of the History Teachers Association. Found in 1997 it remained mostly dormant until late 2000s, when a first publication on teaching history in multiethnic countries was produced, and several seminars led by international experts were held (*Interview with the association’s leadership; Istorikosi journal #1, 2011*). The segment of the teachers’ directly affected by these activities, however, was fairly small (out of 69 capital-based teachers I interviewed, only four were members of the organization, participating in its activities, two of which belonged to the association’s board). Distribution of an alternative textbook produced by the organization, too, only reached a few teachers in a select number of schools (*Interview with the association’s leadership*).
• **Newspapers:** While there was no non-state published newspaper that focused solely on questions of history education/education in general (such as the Õpetajate Leht in Estonia), a popular glossy magazine “Istoriana” was founded by the member of the Tbilisi State Assembly to “provide a regular person from the street with interesting stories from history” (*Interview with the editors, July, 2013*). This attempt to popularize history, however, focused on intrigue and sensational stories, rather than a more reflective, nuanced narratives or discussions, and was rarely concerned with the problem of teaching controversial history in the classroom.

The History Teachers’ Association also produced several issues of its in-house journal in 2011, focusing on history teaching for multi-ethnic audiences\(^\text{25}\), but the circulation numbers were low and only a few teachers had the internet access to download the available issues.

• **Non-History-Focused organizations:** Several other NGOs (not committed exclusively to issues of history) undertook some short-term projects related to the study of the Soviet period, but those activities rarely reached history educators or their students. Distrust of the trade union as the space for teacher communications and the technical focus of the state-run Teacher’s House (which offered—often mandatory—lectures on computer literacy or pedagogy\(^\text{26}\)) left little room for teachers to articulate their diverging narrative, engage in discussions with their colleagues, or be involved in the Ministry-level working groups on how history should be taught, curriculum design, and textbook production.

The next section applies the variables proposed in my theoretical section to explain the different patterns in memory politics described in this section.

**Section IV: Applying the Variables**

**I. State-The Necessary Evil?**

The first variable explaining the discrepancy between mnemonic politics of Estonia and Georgia is the difference in their respective state capacities during the early period of transition, which, in turn, had an effect on the emergence of the public spheres in both countries. In this article, the degree of state capacity is assessed based on the institutional capabilities that determine the state’s ability to provide public goods

\(^{25}\) Available at: http://www.imsa.ge/index.php?page=journal&lng=en_

\(^{26}\) I had a chance to sit in on one such training that was organized on an ad hoc basis at one of the schools where I conducted interviews. The format mostly consisted of a monologue that was largely dominated by the trainers—most of whom were either former teachers-turned trainers of subjects such as math and physics, or individuals with no previous experience in teaching or public schools.
(Ziblatt, 2008). My selection of this variable here is based on the works of some scholars of civil society who suggest that the degree of state capacity affects whether the state views the civil society as a competitor and a challenge or a possible ally. The reason of this logic is as follows: a state with a very strong capacity may possess too many mechanisms to curb the extent of civil society’s activity \(^{27}\), possibly resulting in an administrative state (i.e. a state that turns into the main determining force of social organization). Conversely, states with weak capacity have a disincentive for cooperation, in that the state becomes fearful of undermining or loosing its agency through engagement with other actors. Further, a weak state does not have the administrative resources (e.g. funding, expertise, human capital, etc.), or political resources (e.g. stable political majority in the legislation) to reward civil society for its work or to prevent an excessively active civil society from de-stabilizing domestic politics; it thus comes to view civil society as a competitor (Bermeo, 2000; Scharpf, 1997; Schmitter, 1985). By contrast, a state that is neither too weak, nor too strong to be self-reliant may come to view civil society as a possible ally and a provider of those services the state cannot provide (Kuti, 1999; Sissenich, 2010). This state is likely to act as a network or an ‘umpire’, formulating the rules of social behavior and monitoring their implementation, relying on civil society for the delivery of some services. Unlike the first two scenarios (state with very strong and very weak capacity), this third scenario is more likely to result in an environment favorable to the emergence of vibrant public spheres (Grosse, 2010).

Estonia and Georgia illustrate well the relationship between the degree of state capacity and the likelihood of an emergence of public spheres. Here, I measure each country’s capacity through two indices: 1) the 2006 index of the average state capacity data in post-communist countries, created by Jessica Fortin\(^ {28}\) (based on the measurement of taxing capacity, progress in infrastructure reform, levels of corruption, the quality of property rights protection and the ratio of non-currency money to total money supply, 1989-2006), and 2) the World Bank Governance Index\(^ {29}\), providing year-by-year measurement of state capacity (based on perceptions of the quality of public services, civil service, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies). Data from both of these indices demonstrate the noticeable difference between Georgia and Estonia: while in the second half of

\(^{27}\) While it may be tempting to think that a state with a strong state capacity is more likely to create a viable environment for the civil society, a case of the Communist state suggests a different conclusion. In fact, state’s strength that permitted it an extensive involvement in its citizens’ lives was “far too strong for the good of those [they] governed, so strong that [they] imposed a kind of dismal equality by stifling liberty’ and eliminating the opposition to state views, often manifesting itself in the oppression of the non-sanctioned freedom of association (Mandelbaum 1996: 5).


\(^{29}\) The Worldwide Governance Indicator Project. Available at: http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home
the 90s Estonia earned consistently one of the highest rankings of its capacity as compared to other post-Soviet states, its state capacity development was very gradual (especially, during the earliest period of transition, 1989-1994). In some areas reforms were implemented right away (such as public administration), while in other areas, such as public education, insufficient resource allocation resulted in a lesser role for the government (Nunberg, 2000; Toots, 2007). By contrast, Georgia’s state capacity was very abrupt: in 2005, following the outbreak of the Rose Revolution, Georgia was catapulted from being a frail state with one of the lowest state capacities in the 90s to turning it into a state with extensive reach within most socio-economic spheres, undertaking rapid governmental reforms towards slashing corruption\(^{30}\), collecting taxes\(^{31}\) and improving public and civil services\(^{32}\) (Wertsch, 2006; De Waal, 2011).

The nature of the change of state capacity in both Estonia and Georgia was relevant for the way in which history contestations were handled in the educational sphere. Given the gradually developing state capacity in Estonia and the subsequent paucity of resources and expertise in the educational sphere during the early period of transition, Estonia turned to the emerging civil society groups as the experts that could fill the educational void (Interviews with state officials and NGO leaders in Estonia; Toots, 1997; Oja, 2004). For instance, the dearth of history textbooks during the early period of transition made the state more dependent on textbooks developed by the non-governmental associations described in the previous section. This partial dependence of the state apparatus on the work of these grassroots initiatives, gave these associations greater access to the government (implying greater ease to echo concerns, obtain resources, and impact the making of educational politics). It is in part due to this relationship with the state that the teachers who were members of these organizations were able to participate in working groups designing the curriculum, and, even more importantly, lobby the state to make the curriculum’s rhetoric at least somewhat neutral in respect to the discussion of the more divisive historical periods (Interviews in Tallinn and Tartu, August, 2013).

In the case of Georgia there was a rapid transformation of a weak state into the one with an extensive bureaucratic reach after 2003. Once established, the state was particularly keen to preserve its *modus operandi*. While a fairly open legal environment for NGOs was maintained, the state was wary of engaging in productive working relationships with non-state associations, fearing to lose its power (NGO Sustainability Indices, 2005-2013). This lack of positive relationship with the government made the extent of the civil


\(^{31}\) The global Doing Business indicator of paying taxes moved Georgia’s ranking from 110th place in 2005 to 39th place in 2012.

\(^{32}\) For instance, the statistics for the property registration improved from 150,000 properties being registered in 2003 to 430,000 in 2010 (National Agency of Public Registry).
society’s work severely limited. For instance, when the first alternative textbook developed by the Georgian History Teachers’ Association was produced—tackling the issue of interethnic relationships and their respective historical narratives—the state was unwilling to allow the Association to use the state-run venues (such as the Teacher’s House) for publicizing the book. Similar obstructions were placed on delivering the textbook directly to schools (*Interviews with NGO representatives, 2013*). This lack of government collaboration and/or endorsement meant that the alternative mnemonic spheres—in the form of those NGOs that attempted to initiate history discussions and address history teaching—were limited in their ability to bring together the splintered narratives of the teachers.

**II. Institutional Memory of Associational Life**

While state capacity and its rate of change influenced the environment in which the alternative mnemonic spheres operated, the institutional memory of associational life sheds light on the nature of these spheres’ self-organization skills. The literature on communist civil societies favored looking at the length of totalitarian rule to explain the record of democratic achievement/vibrancy of civil society (Howard, 2003; Linz and Stepan, 1997; Bernhard and Karakoc, 2007), yet, this variable alone falls short of explaining the diversity in civil societies even among those states that experienced the same length of the totalitarian rule. For that reason, instead of using the length of the totalitarian rule variable here, I focus on the institutional memory of associational life—which accounts both for the presence of civil society institutions before socialism, and the presence of institutional mechanisms perpetuating these institutions during the Soviet era, thus providing a more nuanced insight into the building blocks that were available to civil societies in the post-Communist era.

The difference between the institutional memories of associational life is instructive for both Georgia and Estonia. Estonian teachers were one of the main professional groups that were at the heart of a civil society self-organizing efforts during the time of the National Awakening in the 19th century. Over 70% of the members of the Society of Estonian Literati—an organization of regular citizens that took charge of the development of secondary schools (including curriculum and textbook writing)—were teachers (Trasberg, 2001; Stevick, 2006). Particular active within this group were history teachers, who formed several voluntary associations concerning history and civics teaching. Discussions were held on both the nature of historiography, as well as how the discourse should adopt itself in light of the presence of large minority groups in schools (*Ministry of Education Document, 1932*). These discussions often informed or even changed state policies of the pre-War period, thus setting an important institutional precedent for the modern-day teachers-/activists-who went on to form similar organizations post-1987. Equally important, however, was
the fact that these spaces established before and during the first republic continued to exist in a modified form even during the Soviet Union. Astute diplomacy of Ferdinand Eisen (ESSR Minister of Education, 1960-1980) with the Communist Party in Moscow ensured that a modicum of autonomy was preserved in the educational curricula. History teachers sustained the pre-Soviet tradition of congregating in small, self-organized caucuses, on an annual basis since 1962 (Review of Estonian Educational Practices in the Soviet Union, Museum/Archive of Pedagogy in Tallinn). It is not surprising then, that the teachers had an extensive legacy of associational life (much of which was preserved and later stored at the Museum of Pedagogy, where I have conducted my archival fieldwork) to draw from, informing their post-Soviet organizational practices and the alternative mnemonic spheres addressing the questions of history.

Georgia’s institutional legacies of associational life from the same period, by contrast, were described not by locally initiated efforts, but by externally imposed models (De Waal, 2010). While both Georgia and Estonia were a part of the Russian empire, the Russian leadership mostly left Estonian system to its own devices because of the high degree of self-organization in its educational sphere. By contrast, the Georgian educational system of the 19th century was informed by the visions of Russian viceroys, “who understood empire as a civilizational gift to less developed peoples… [to promote] local trade, education, and the infrastructure of civil society” (Jones, 2014). The implications of this model were that there was little tradition of grassroots level discussions and self-organization among the agents themselves. This framework was further perpetuated by the fact that the Soviet system, which succeeded the imperial one after a short three-year period of independence, continued to inform the nature of the education, thus leaving little room for the formation of alternative spaces. Given the value the Soviet system had in maintaining a very particular understanding of history, history education was largely prescribed by the Center (i.e. Moscow); the main space for convening—the Institute of Pedagogy—was dominated by the state, that mostly limited the scope of the institute’s influence to the translation of textbooks into Georgian (Interviews with teachers, January 2013; May-July, 2013). After considering Georgia’s institutional memory of associational life, it is then not surprising that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia’s history teachers—who had to tackle issues significantly more controversial than educators of other disciplines —lacked the tools/legacy to form effective alternative spaces to hold these much-needed discussions.

III. Moral Community?

Whereas my second variable (the institutional memory of associational life) explains the nature of self-organization of mnemonic spheres, I propose a third variable of the belonging/prospect of belonging to a
moral community— an entity defined by the nominal acceptance of the mutually agreed upon norms and values—to explain the shaping of the discourse inside the mnemonic sphere. I posit that the belonging/prospect of belonging to a moral community aligns an internal discourse held within the domestic mnemonic spheres with that of an externally chosen moral community. The existence of a moral community can impact the discussion within alternative mnemonic spaces 1) ideationally (by drawing an implicit link between a community membership and the way in which the past is addressed), and 2) through administrative support (the transfer of human and physical resources). The impact of a moral community is especially clear in the case of Estonia, where the emergence of alternative mnemonic spheres coincided with the period when Estonia expressed its aspirations of joining the EU. The two subsections below demonstrate how the ideational pressure and the administrative support from the EU made the existence of alternative public spheres in Estonia possible, as well as encouraged the alternative mnemonic spheres to be more open by including both mainstream and minority historical narratives.

A. Ideational Belonging

Active civil society as a defining Western characteristic, and a ‘return to the West’ had been lingering on the minds of Estonian intellectuals and students of history since early 1960s, with history being viewed as one of the more important tools to accomplish this goal (Alapuro, 2005). The last decades of the Soviet empire witnessed a formation of underground groups that were united by their growing infatuation with the Western approaches in historiography; this trend was especially noticeable in the circles of history students of Tartu University—the alma mater to many Estonian history teachers. If learning history through a historical materialism lens was associated with symbolically belonging to the Soviet Union, learning history (even if doing so clandestinely) the ‘Western way’ represented a symbolic breakaway (Kivimae, 1999; Misiunas and Taagepera, 1993). After 1991, democratization of historical discourses became an unspoken requirement for Estonia (as well as other aspirants for the EU membership) to become a member of the Council of Europe, and later, the EU (Michaels and Steveck, 2009; Pakier, 2010). This drive to become a part of the Western moral community prevented the implementation of more ethno-nationalistic initiatives in the educational sphere (Lauristin, et. Al 1997; Jurado, 2003). For instance, while the political elites were keen on denouncing the “Soviet occupants” and emphasizing the victimhood narrative in history textbooks (using the language that could marginalize the Russian-speaking residents of Estonia), these efforts were partially curtailed in order not endanger the prospects of the EU membership.

Alternative mnemonic spheres (represented by the voluntary associations described earlier) were equally affected by this drive for European belonging. For them, belonging to Europe was realized through a
membership in Euroclio (the all-European Association for History Teachers). Belonging to this group meant complying with its principles—one of which called for a creation of an open space to discuss and teach history in a way that allows for the ‘multiperspectivity’ of interpretations (Interview with heads of several NGOs, Tallinn and Tartu, August, 2013). In light of this principle, inclusion of Russian-speaking teachers became a central matter for local NGOs: my Russian-speaking interviewees recalled the special efforts that were made in the early 90s to encourage them to attend seminars or participate in projects in order to jointly develop new curricula and textbooks. A significant share of seminar publications were concerned with fostering open discussions, mindful of alternative narratives of more controversial periods of history—such as the Holocaust, the Soviet annexation, and Estonia’s experience in the World War II (Stevick, 2006; Interviews with Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking teachers.). This sentiment of the need to change the discourse to become a part of the European community was echoed in one of my interviewee’s anecdotes:

While I was attending an international Euroclio conference for history teachers, at a working group discussing Holocaust teaching I realized I could not really contribute to the discussion—simply because our curricula did not even address this topic…it was great to feel a part of the global community, but it also meant that if we were to become full-fledged members of this community, we had to initiate conversations on topics that were not even discussed before.

B. Administrative Support/Resource Inflow

In addition to the appeal of ‘belonging to the West’ that influenced the nature of activities within the alternative mnemonic groups, European financial and logistical support also played an important role in sustaining these efforts. Following the restoration of Estonia’s independence in 1991, international organizations such as the IMF, EBRD, and WB were assisting Estonia’s reforms to ‘Europeanize’, with both financial resources, and even more importantly, with professional expertise (Aslund, 2002). This assistance was valuable for the creation and the development of new public spaces in the educational realm that emerged in the form of NGOs (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 1997). As one of the leaders of the NGO concerned with history and civics teaching recalled:

All of a sudden [in the early 90s] Estonia was flooded with Western money intending to support different initiatives. At that point, the government was still ‘very Soviet’ in that they were not sure what to do with these funds and they were unwilling to somehow compromise
their autonomy and the rigidity of the educational system by committing to do what these grants asked for. For those of us, however, who were fairly young and active, these resources became both a source of income and a way to realize our goals by giving us the leverage to be the drivers of reforms on the grassroots level.

For alternative mnemonic spheres, this support was instrumental by assisting with the organization of seminars, courses, summers schools, attendance of international conferences as part of the Euroclio network, and recruitment of foreign educators and civil society trainers. A share of these resources were put towards hiring interpreters, to ensure more extensive involvement of the Russian-speaking teachers in the seminars (Interviews with Estonian Teacher and Russian Teachers in Tartu, 2013). While funding and training alone cannot implant a genuine multi-perspectivity in memory or lead to a true dialectic between agents with diverging historical narratives, it does provide the participants with a much-needed venue to become aware of alternative views. This sentiment was echoed in many of my interviews—best captured by this statement from one of the Russian-speaking teachers:

These seminars and conferences certainly did not mean that perceptions of history changed. To be frank, many of us were attracted to the fact that these activities offered free resources, free vacations through summer schools, sometimes even free travel in Europe [by participating in an international conference], and an opportunity to mingle with colleagues. What these discussions/get-togethers also did, however, was to introduce me to alternative historical narratives of my colleagues, although I may have disagreed with them. This certainly helps in a classroom setting--when I teach about the events of the World War II, I am especially sensitive to my audience’s background. I will not talk about the Russians as the occupiers, if my students’ grandparents fought in the war. However, if asked about the diverging narrative in the textbook, I will explain the alternative discourse by asking my students to imagine themselves in the shoes of a small nation that had its institutions and intelligentsia intact before it was annexed to the Soviet Union.

Georgia’s Uncertain Moral Community

If the prospect of belonging to the EU prompted the change within the alternative mnemonic communities in Estonia, Georgia’s view of its belonging to an external moral community was more conflicted. While similar to Estonia, for Georgian intelligentsia the sun has historically rose in the West, its acceptance of the European moral community was of a more selective nature (Briscu, 2013). In terms of
their civilizational belonging there is a strong belief among Georgians that “I am Georgian, therefore, I am European” (Caucasus Barometer Survey “Attitude Towards the EU”, 2009, 2011, 2013); in practice, however, belonging to Europe is not necessarily understood in terms of embracing European socio-cultural values—especially those that encourage a more open approach toward diversity in historical, cultural, gender, and social identities (in fact, over 30% of Georgians with higher education think that the EU is a threat to the Georgian national identity and only 10% of those interested in learning more about the EU were interested in receiving information about EU cultural programs, in 2013 and 2009 respectively) (ibid.). This ideational disconnect from the EU as the moral community was equally reflected in my interviews with the history teachers. When asked about the role of history education and their views on the European mnemonic framework with its emphasis on the diversity of historical narratives, over 50% of teachers (42/69) echoed the sentiment that it was this focus on diversity in European social studies that were partially at fault for “growing promiscuity and disappearing morality among the European youth.” Thus, on an ideational level, the EU was not perceived as a normative compass and a sufficient incentive for the teachers to organize themselves for a critical discussion of the teaching of history, especially, its more difficult periods (nor was the prospect of joining the EU community as imminent in the Georgian case, as it has been for Estonia).

IV. The New Middle Class?

The final variable that shaped Estonia’s alternative mnemonic spheres is the emergency of an entrepreneurial, literati middle class. Many of the NGO leaders described in earlier sections were members of the same generational cohort and graduates of the history department of Tartu University--an institution that largely preserved itself as an independent intellectual center during the Soviet period (Kivimae, 1999). Even before the proverbial gates to the West opened, some students and professors were members of informal groups studying smuggled Western social science literature. These experiences laid foundations for networks between group members, ultimately forging highly connected and organized communities of activists, which were already formed when the Soviet Union collapsed (Bennich-Bjorkman, 2006; 2007). While some of these former history teachers (such as the former prime-minister, Mart Laar, and the former minister of education Tõnis Lukas) ultimately joined the top political echelons under the nationalist banner based in the non-inclusive historical narrative, others used their experiences in self-organizing and their connections to these political leaders to carve out the necessary autonomy for their NGOs—alternative mnemonic spheres concerned with history teaching (Interviews with NGO leaders and former politicians in Tallinn and Tartu).
In addition to the domestic human capital, this generation of social activists and their work benefited from the strong ties to the countries with large Estonian diasporas, which assisted these mushrooming voluntary associations both financially and otherwise (ibid.) Due to these connections, the leaders of these grassroots organizations concerned with history teaching were able to participate themselves, as well as send some of their members to programs abroad, in countries such as Sweden, Finland, Canada, Germany (interviews with NGO leaders in Tallinn). These experiences abroad in countries, such as Germany, that had already developed a framework to address the dark and/or controversial periods in the educational realm were equally invaluable for informing the structure of the Estonian mnemonic spheres. Additionally, these civil society groups benefited from the return of Estonian migrants from the West (who comprised almost 30% of all returning migrants in the 90s), the majority of whom were bringing back not only a wealth of Western professional experiences, but also, the memories of the pre-war civic activities (Kulu and Tammaru, 2000).

In certain ways, the Georgian experience in respect to the rise of the new intelligentsia middle class was similar to that of Estonia. While, in contrast to Estonia, there was significantly less historical experience in self-organizing on the grassroots level for the purposes of discussing history and history teaching, Georgia of early 2000s witnessed the emergence of a small, but dynamic cohort of young professionals (including a handful of history teachers) in their 30s and early 40s, many of whom studied abroad for a short period of time before the outbreak of the Rose Revolution in 2003 and were eager to foster a more open, discursive environment in schools (including a history teaching curriculum). Contrary to the Estonian activists from the new middle class, however, much of this human capital did not use this energy and experiences to form active public spheres, as most of them were recruited by the increasingly centralized state institutions (Janashia, 2010), which offered competitive salaries and benefits (the average salary of a public servant was three times higher than that of a teacher/education sphere employee) (Janashia, 2014).

Conclusion

Even 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, most Eurasian states continue to be entangled in bitter wars over diverging historical interpretations. These battles are not trivial, as they affect the quality of inter-state relationships and alliances, inform the visions of future domestic policies and political regimes, and shape the divides between the people, at times resulting in splintered nations that cannot move forward. Developing a systematic and generalizable framework, complemented by rich anthropological data to understand the patterns of how these divisions over history are handled, is thus both important and timely.
This paper explored the divergence in memory politics by focusing on how these divergences were handled on a civil society level—rather than a more common state-level analysis—by focusing on the educational sphere of two post-Soviet states—Estonia and Georgia. Both witnessed significant divisions in the narratives of the teachers on how history should be taught (ethno-linguistic in Estonia and generational for Georgia), and, in particular, how the Soviet Union should be discussed in the context of a history course at schools. Estonian civil societies formed alternative mnemonic spaces outside of schools that became safe venues for the teachers to engage with each other; while in Georgia, these splintered narratives remained largely atomized, without recourse to a secure discursive space. In the course of the paper I demonstrated that previously cited variables for explaining the divergence in mnemonic spheres—the level of economic development, time elapsed, and the nature of the laws and political institutions in the country—were comparable between Estonia and Georgia, and could not explain their different grassroots memory politics. Moving beyond the published literature on mnemonic spheres and drawing from the insights of the literature on civil societies, I identified alternative four variables to explain the divergence: state capacity, institutional memory of associational life, belonging/prospect of belonging to the so-called moral community, and the emergence of a well-connected middle class that maintains its autonomy from the state. Examination of these variables in both case studies suggested that they were essential in shaping the environment for the formation of alternative mnemonic spheres, the organization and the discourse within these spheres (or the lack thereof) in Estonia and Georgia.

While the goal of this paper was to provide a more generalizable framework to explain the patterns of memory politics, the scope of this project limited me to the application of my variables to two case studies; in order to make the model more rigorous in the future, however, the framework developed here can be applied to a large number of cases studies of other states undergoing significant political transitions (post-Soviet, or not). Additional variables—along with the ones proposed here—should also be considered; for instance, a more thorough examination of the spread of social media and its possible impact on the formation of mnemonic spheres would be an important variable to investigate. From a methodological standpoint, while the fieldwork for this research mostly focused on memory politics and mnemonic spheres in capital or main cities (Tallinn, Tartu, and Tbilisi), future studies might benefit from paying more attention to the dynamics of the history contestations in less central locales. Studying the battles over Clio—that interconnected web of histories and memories—is a wooly subject, fraught with challenges of neat data collection, lack of existing datasets, and a multitude of actors; while the model developed here
does not claim to be comprehensive, I hope it provides a helpful framework for studying an important, yet all-too-often neglected aspect of politics in transition in a more systematic manner.

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