



# The Tale *of* Three Stalins

**L**ate one night in June 2010, a team of Georgian government officials and municipal workers snuck into the central square in Gori, the town of Joseph Stalin's birthplace, and toppled a 20-foot bronze statue of Stalin (or "Koba," as he was known in Georgian) that had adorned the town since the 1950s. They had to

sneak in because, in spite of Stalin's notorious brutality and the intense de-Sovietization campaign pushed by the pro-Western leader Mikhail Saakashvili, many Georgians still admired Stalin—he was, after all, their compatriot. The story of a local boy turned powerful global leader had become legendized, particularly among older Georgians.

Tinatin Japaridze at the Stalin Museum in Gori on Joseph Stalin's personal railway carriage, which Stalin rode to the Potsdam Conference in 1945. All photos in the article are by Zaqaria Chelidze and taken in April 2021.

# Tinatin Japaridze *in* Profile

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The toppling of the statue—and its resurrection under a new government only a few years later—is the perfect illustration of the complexity (and controversy) that still surrounds Stalin. And this complexity has fascinated Tinatin Japaridze (MARS-REERS, 2019) ever since she wrote a paper about it for Alexander Cooley's Legacies

of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union course in 2016—a paper that Cooley encouraged her to continue expanding after the course ended, and which she had kept researching throughout the program, visiting Georgia and conducting interviews with the help of various grants from the Institute. Now, five years later, that paper has grown

into a book manuscript, forthcoming with Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group next fall.

The manuscript, “The Tale of Three Stalins,” examines Stalin’s increasing popularity in Georgia and Russia and analyzes how his image, and the nostalgia it evokes, is “manipulated and exploited” for political gain, says Japaridze. It argues that, in addition to the evil dictator and the Georgian comrade, there is a third portrayal of Stalin—the one projected by the youngest former Soviet: “the generation that saw the tail end of the Soviet Union,” says Japaridze.

Born in Georgia in the mid-1980s, and raised in Russia, Japaridze belongs to the post-Soviet generation she describes, and she incorporates some of her experiences into the manuscript. “It’s a book about Stalin’s legacies and Stalin’s broader legacy as a political figure, but seen through the very personal prism of a memoir,” she says.

The project did not start out this way. Rowman & Littlefield publishes academic work, and Japaridze, who is not an academic, fell into the publishing contract by chance. At the time, just a few months after she’d graduated from the Harriman Institute, she was managing a political campaign for an assembly candidate in New York—she wanted to understand the inner workings of U.S. politics from the inside so she could have a better grasp on U.S.-Russia relations. But she also continued to be active in the world of Slavic and Eurasian studies and had submitted an abstract to present a paper on the role of Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian politics to the 2019 convention for the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. The publishing house



Japaridze at the Stalin Museum in Gori, inside the Jughashvili family’s wood-and-mud-brick house where Soso Jughashvili lived for the first four years of his life.

noticed the abstract in the conference program and, thinking that Japaridze was an academic, approached her to submit a book proposal on the topic.

As fate would have it, Japaridze missed the conference because of her political work and never ended up writing the proposed paper. When the publishing house asked whether she had any other ideas, she sent them the paper she’d written for Professor Cooley’s Legacies course and explained that she had been conducting research on the topic for years. Rowman & Littlefield’s acquisitions editors loved the idea and asked for a book proposal. Japaridze agreed, without realizing

how time-consuming writing a book proposal would be. It was only after she sent it off, and Rowman & Littlefield was about to take her on, that the academic publishing house realized she did not have a doctorate and she realized they had assumed she did. They had never published someone without a Ph.D. before, but they told her that if she wrote a draft, they would consider it. By then, Japaridze had invested too much time in the project to say no.

Meanwhile, she was working overtime for the New York City Census 2020, overseeing strategy to mobilize New Yorkers to complete the census at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Right after the census, she began to work on New York's COVID-19 response as the press secretary for NYC Health + Hospitals. On the side, she was also volunteering for an organization called Girl Security, mentoring girls and female-identifying high school students who wanted to pursue careers in international security. It was an intense period. She would wake up before sunrise and write until she started work, around 8:00 a.m. "I treated it like a workout regimen," she says.

Japaridze is no stranger to hard work. In her previous career, she was an acclaimed singer and songwriter. She

toured internationally, penned songs with composers who worked behind artists like Barbra Streisand and Celine Dion, and cowrote Iceland's 2009 Eurovision Song Contest entry (which won Silver). And, when she started her bachelor's at Columbia University's School of General Studies in 2014, she was in the process of staging a successful Off-Broadway show, *Matryoshka: The Musical*, that she'd cowritten and produced with the now late composer and lyricist Timothy Graphenreed.

The work ethic she had developed earlier in life was invaluable during the book writing process. After six months

of intense labor, Japaridze was able to complete a rough draft. Though it was largely an academic work, she had included one small personal section about visiting the Stalin Museum in Gori. The publishers loved it and wanted her to incorporate more personal elements. That's how the book, which recently passed through the peer review process, became a hybrid that will be marketed to both academic and general audiences.

Japaridze is excited. As she completes the peer review edits for her book in progress, she is already working on her second manuscript—a nonfiction narrative about her great-aunt, the wife of the head of the Cultural Propaganda Department of the Central Committee in the Georgian SSR and editor-in-chief of the newspaper the *Communist*, who was murdered by the Stalin regime. She received a grant for the project from the State Department Title VIII program on Russia and Eurasia and has been conducting research in Georgia this year. She is also a fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy's Eurasia Democratic Security Network on Georgia-related security issues and is directing policy and strategy for the Critical Mass, a female veteran-owned, Virginia-based organization focusing on global security, where she's finishing a report on disinformation and public health.

It's a lot to manage, but, Japaridze has learned to prioritize. "I never bite off more than I can chew," she says. "And it helps to truly love and be grateful for what I do. There's a great sense of accomplishment at the end of each day." ■

*Left: Japaridze's reflection in the glass frame of an oil painting, "Stalin and a Girl."*

