

The Politics of Memory in Russia:
Historical Policy vs Alternative Memory Project

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ABSTRACT

The thesis considers questions of politics of memory in contemporary Russia, the historical policy implemented by the state and possibilities for alternative memorial projects to emerge and change the current politics of memory and the political regime in general. The case study for this research is the Last Address alternative memorial project which installs small memorial plaques on buildings known as the last residential addresses of people who were repressed during the Soviet times for political reasons. One of the most important features of the project is that it communicates directly with residents in order to receive the consent to install the plaque on the wall which they owe. Both macro level of communication of the project with different state and non-state actors and micro level of communication with citizens are discussed. In order to answer the questions Jeffrey Olick's process-relational approach to collective memory as the main analytical framework is chosen. Interviews with the project coordinators and volunteers are collected as well as the research of the opening ceremonies of plaques is done. Thesis states that the possibilities for the emergence and development of the project are hidden in the authoritarian character of Russian political system as well as in tactics of the project: creative use of law, financial structure, chosen periodization of memory. Changes which the project brings to the politics of memory in Russia are connected to the deep emotional involvement of citizens into the project by volunteer working with residents. This project opens several possibilities for democratic changes which are to be discussed in the concluding parts of the work.

Key words: politics of memory, historical policy, alternative memory, political repressions, process-relational methodology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER 1 – THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STATE AND ITS HISTORY.....	12
1.1. The field of power in Russia: the complexity of the state	12
1.2. The state and its History	15
1.3. Vladimir Putin’s rhetoric	18
CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL REPRESSIONS, REHABILITATION AND COMMEMORATIONS BEFORE THE LAST ADDRESS	21
2.1. Political repressions and rehabilitation process in USSR.....	21
2.2. Commemorations of victims in 1990s, 2000s and the first part of 2010s	25
CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF THE LAST ADDRESS AND ITS TACTICS IN THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN RUSSIA.....	30
3.1. Definitional aspects.....	31
3.2. «In the ideological sense it is incorrect to ask money from the state» – Financial aspects of the Project.....	32
3.3. Archival work	33
3.4. From memorial plaque to informational plaque – Legal aspects of the project	35
3.5. «We made all the necessary attempts to talk» – Communication with the State	37
3.6. Communication with the local power holders	40
CHAPTER 4: CITIZENS, EMOTIONS AND COMMUNITY	44
4.1 Media of memory in the urban landscape.....	44
4. 2. Personalized memory and the democratic change	45
4.3. Proximity and the democratic change.....	47
4.4. All-pervading state	48
4.5. Opening ceremonies and the community of the Last Address.....	49
CONCLUSION	51
LIST OF REFERENCES	53

INTRODUCTION

Recent literature in the field of memory studies suggests thinking about collective memory not as a solid and reified phenomenon but as a process which includes a complex system of relations between different actors (Olick, 2007). In particular, many authors who study post-totalitarian countries (Germany, post-Soviet countries etc.) start to avoid using the dichotomy official vs. alternative memory as a dogma, stop thinking of elite and public memories as completely distinct entities (Gould, Silverman, 2013; Cook, van Riemsdijk, 2014) and decide to pay more attention to the democratization of collective memory processes: studying memories of different social groups (Hayden, 1997; Hoelscher, S., & Alderman, 2004), understanding the role of individuals in the production of memories and analyzing the system of relations between different (state and non-state) actors in the process of collective remembering (Jović, 2004; Langenohl, 2008). These studies coincide with the increased numbers of memorial projects which are more democratic in their goals and ways of commemoration involving citizens directly into memorial processes.

Democratic processes are not that evident and successful in post-Soviet Russia than, for example, in post-totalitarian Germany and hence the collective memory processes connected to the totalitarian past are different in Western-European and in Russian contexts (Forrest, Johnson, Till, 2004). Alexander Etkind in his book «Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied» (2013) writes in general that: *The state does not like building monuments to commemorate its crimes in the past.* Considering intensification of the use of history by Russian state actors in 2000s (Miller, 2012) and authoritarian character of Russian power system (Gelman, 2015) it seems to be very unlikely for the memory of totalitarian past in different ways to emerge in Russia.

It is possible to list a lot of examples of how the state operates with the Soviet past today; I will just mention few of them to introduce the context. The new bronze statue of Stalin was unveiled in the center Moscow in September, 2017 sponsored by Moscow city administration and accompanied with the unveiling ceremony and invited celebrities. «The Death of Stalin» is a

satiric movie about the struggle for power in the Soviet Union after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953; it was banned by the Ministry of Culture of Russia in January, 2017. After the scandal which was caused by this action several deputies of the parliament expressed their critical voices against this movie and defended Stalin's role in Russian history. The most recent news came in June, 2018: historians and archivists from the «Museum of GULAG¹» discovered that archival cards with the information about politically repressed people in USSR are to be deleted from the state archives in accordance with the secret order from 2014.

On the other hand there are more glorious historical events such as the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (the Second World War) which is widely celebrated in Russia annually: there are major official events (such as the 9th of May Victory parade or grand fireworks at that day), a lot of monuments and memorials, films, TV and radio programs, also some successful grassroots actions (such as extremely popular action – «Immortal Regiment») and, of course, this narrative is largely supported by the state: organizational, financial, administrative and other resources of Russian government are used in order to reproduce, protect and control it.

It is evident from studies of Russian politics and politics of memory and especially from the recent example of deleted archival cards that Russian state actors does not want to touch this inconvenient past (or even want to forget it) and prefer to focus and commemorate other more glorious historical events. Another obstacle for the memory of political repressions in USSR is that the Victory in the War was reached under the rule of the Joseph Stalin (end of 1920s-1953) who at the mane time killed a lot of innocent people during his rule (especially in 1937-1938 known as the Great Purge). Nevertheless even in this context there are several civic organizations and memorial projects which exist and work directly with the topic of political repressions in the Soviet Union in order to commemorate victims of this regime and they do it in a very similar democratic way to the projects which operate in freer contexts of the Western Europe.

¹ (Chief Administration of (Labor) Camps)

In the thesis I would like to answer the question of **how is it possible for an alternative memory of totalitarian past to exist and function in the context of the historical policy performed by the authoritarian state**. This question is divided into two sub-sections. On the one hand this thesis addresses the role of the authoritarian state and its uses of history (historical policy) and what is left in this context for alternative projects. On the other hand I will look at the particular alternative memorial project – The Last Address which commemorates victims of political repressions in USSR in the urban context in order to understand first of all how it was created and developed (the history of the project which is connected to the first part of the question) and secondly how it changes the current politics of memory in Russia through implementing democratic practices in its work.

The Last Address project is one of civic initiatives to commemorate victims of the terror in the Soviet Union. Small (palm-sized) minimalistic memorial plaques made from the stainless steel are installed on the buildings known as the last residential addresses of



arrested people. Each plaque is installed in memory of the only one person (the slogan is «*One name, one life, one sign*») with brief information about him or her: Name – Profession – Born – Arrested – Killed – Rehabilitated (see the figure).

The project was introduced by the organization International Memorial² and civic activists in December, 2013³ (the main initiator and the director is journalist and publisher Sergey Parkhomenko).

² International Memorial – the international historical, educational, charitable and human rights organization which is non-profit and non-governmental grassroots society. Since 1990s Memorial studies political repressions in USSR and contemporary Russia: collect databases, study sources, give lectures and perform a lot of human rights activities.

The applicant (and sponsor) of the installation of the concrete plaque is also the only one particular person, who lives/works in this building today or just anyone who wants to commemorate repressed person, it also may be a friend or family member (mainly children and grandchildren). The initiator just go to the big database of repressed people collected by specialists from the Memorial, search for the person who may be commemorated, fill the request form and pay 4000 rubles (approximately 60 euros). Then archivists of the project check all the information about this person and an important note is that the consent of the owner(s) of the façade where the plaque is placed is essential that is why volunteer work directly with the owners (mainly with residents of buildings) to receive this consent. After all preparations are finished coordinators of the project organize small opening ceremony inviting applicant, relatives, friends and other interested people.

All important details of the work of this project will be discussed in the thesis but it is important to mention from the very beginning that this project was inspired by the similar project in Europe – «Stumbling Stones» is the name of Gunter Demnig's project which aims to commemorate victims of Holocaust by installing small cobble stones into the road with the brief information about the person who was taken from this place and later killed during Holocaust in Europe.

In order to answer main research questions qualitative research methods mainly are used. The design of the research can be considered in the general research methodology – case study (Yin, 1989). The Last Address project is an exceptional case for the memory work in Russia not only because it touches an inconvenient past which state does not want to remember (there are other organization which deal with the memory of political repressions – Memorial is one of them) but

³ For 2018 there are more than 600 signs installed in 30 Russian cities. 1400 signs are registered for an installation.

also because it is different from other urban memorials in using democratic principles: direct communication with citizens and receiving the consent are one of the most important ones.

Research is conducted in Moscow (where the headquarters of the project is located) and in Saint-Petersburg (the second city after Moscow counted by installed plaques).

These methods and data are used:

- (1) In the process of the preliminary research an existing data about the project in the internet were collected: media publications, interviews, videos from opening ceremonies, online discussions etc., in order to better understand the structure of the organization, the connections with the state (the organization – Memorial is marked as «foreign agent» what means certain restrictions), and others aspects which can be found in the Internet. The Last Address project web-site contains a lot of articles, videos, photo-galleries about the project work and development from 2013 till now which helped a lot at the preliminary stage.
- (2) 11 semi-structured interviews with people who participate in this project are conducted:
(1) Sergey Parkhomenko – director and main coordinator of the project, (2) 2 project coordinators who work in Moscow and in Saint-Petersburg, (3) 2 archivists of the project in both cities, (4) 6 volunteers who work directly with citizens.
- (3) Observations during unveiling ceremonies and small conversations with participants are conducted as well (April 22, May 6). Videos from other ceremonies are watched (with emphasis on speeches).
- (4) Historical sources and articles about political repressions, the process of rehabilitation and commemoration during 20th and 21 centuries are used.

In the beginning paragraph I emphasized the tendency to see collective memory as a process and as a complex system of relations between different actors. It is important to provide an explanation for this approach and discuss its aspects which can help to understand the role of alternative actors in the politics of memory in Russia. Here I will briefly summarize the main methodological suggestions provided by process-relational approach to collective memory developed by Jeffrey Olick (2007) and presented in his book: «The politics of regret: on collective memory and historical responsibility».

Jeffrey Olick criticizes Durkheimian approach to memory which was used by the classics of the field – Maurice Halbwachs in his famous book – «On Collective Memory» (1992)⁴. As Durkheim sees and writes Society with the capital S as an entity by itself which is not right, Halbwachs sees memory⁵. Olick states that this is not right and we have to reject this and following statements. Instead of this generalizing approach to society and memory Olick suggests that collective memory: (1) is rather different, changing and contested than united; (2) it exists only in the form of representation so is not mimetically connected to the past; (3) it is not material but processual and may be only presented in an object; (4) it is not independent (as Durkheimian Society) but very connected to other elements of culture.

In order to support his ideas Olick suggests 4 new analytical instruments to look at the collective memory which are: field, media of memory, genre and profile.

Following Pierre Bourdieu Olick thinks collective memory as a (battle) field where different actors act. Bourdieu in «The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field» understands field as «*network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions*» (Bourdieu, 1996 as cited in Olick, 2007). The most important field (meta-field) according to Bourdieu is the field

⁴ Originally published in 1925 – «Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire» (literal translation – Social frames of memory).

⁵ It is important to note that Halbwachs was more accurate in his analysis of collective memory using not the Society but Groups of society (and hence Group memory).

of power. An important analytical implication from the concept of field is that as Olick suggest in order to understand the system of relations in the field of collective memory it is important to look at different further fields of memory: official or vernacular and only in relation to each other. And also not to think about them as constants – these fields are always in change.

Memory is not the past, and it is connected to past only through representation, it exists only in media of memory (Olick, 2007). The idea of the media of memory is that the act of remembering is processual and media of this process define and transform the message that is why it is always important to look at the forms in which the message is mediated.

In his description of the concept of genre Olick uses Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical approach: *It is important to take into account not only the dialogue of the past event with its commemoration in the present, but all the previous stages of the commemoration that left a mark on the work of the memory* (Bakhtin, 2010 as cited in Olick, 2007).

Olick's idea of profile which is about dependency of the collective memory from the political culture seems for me unnecessary and covered by the previous analytical concepts (especially the concept of the field) which are used in this thesis as a general guiding principles but in the following chapters I will develop them using concepts which are closer to the Russian context but the general approach remains the same throughout the thesis – and it is process-relational.

Thesis is organized as follows. First of all, I will show the complexity of the Russian power system, how Russian state uses history (historical policy) and which possibilities these aspects open for alternatives. In Chapter 2 in accordance with Bakhtin's dialogical approach I will trace the history of political repressions in USSR as well as rehabilitations and commemorations of victims in Russia showing also important actors and events which contributed to this politics of memory in today's Russia. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the Last Address project itself, presenting its history and different aspects of the work which help to operate in the politics of memory in

Russia. The last chapter contains information about how the project functions on the level of communication with citizens; which emotional ties creates, which changes bring to the politics of memory in Russia on micro level. In conclusion main findings of the whole thesis are presented.

CHAPTER 1 – THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STATE AND ITS HISTORY

In this chapter I will start providing an answer for the first research question which is about possibilities of an alternative memory in Russia. Adopting Olick's concept of the field of power I will show main state actors, relations between them and those opportunities which this configuration provides for an alternative actors. First of all the model of the state as a solid entity will be rejected and more complex model will be developed. Secondly main characteristics of the Russian field of power will be discussed as well as opportunities which it opens for an alternative. After that I will discuss the connection between the field of power and the field of official memory (Olick, 2007) and develop my conceptual framework. Finally, I will show which narrative dominant state actors use to understand which alternative narratives are compatible with this official one and which are not.

1.1. The field of power in Russia: the complexity of the state

First of all it is important to clearly understand what I mean by the state and who or what it actually is. Bob Jessop (2016) sees the state not as an entity but as a set of social relations which are situated in the context of wider social forces. This understanding helps to distinguish different strategic effects which are produced by these relations and thus explain more aspects of how the state works. Jessop calls this approach *strategic-relational* and it fits very well with the chosen general approach to memory as *process-relational* phenomenon. In accordance with this relational approach to the state I will look at the Russian state in particular: describe the system of power inside it, distinguish key actors who operate inside this system.

Applying Jessop's state model to the Russian case I will address Vladimir Gelman who discusses the history and the current state of Russian politics after the collapse of the USSR in his book – «Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes» (2015). First of all he provides a definition for the concept of politics as a struggle for the power (its achievement, implementation and retention), which requires legitimation by the coercive forces (army, police etc.) and

establishing the *rules of the game* (constitution, laws etc.). These *rules* are the most important element in his argument about the main characteristic of Russian regime.

Gelman continues by presenting a contradiction between democratic regimes and authoritarian ones. The main *game rule* of the former is the freedom of choice which means equal, free and transparent elections; he calls countries with this type of regime – *electoral democracies* while the latter (authoritarian regime) is characterized by the absence of this freedom. Despite the fact that Russia has electoral institutes Gelman states that they are not equal and not free⁶. Hence, he defines Russian regime as an *electoral authoritarianism*. As he writes, after the collapse of USSR Russia saved authoritarian characteristics but added to them several (artificial) democratic electoral institutes which do not work as they should in electoral democracies.

After defining Russian state as authoritarian Gelman lists main features of the current *rules of the game in Russian politics*:

- Monopolization of the decision making processes in hands of the leader (president Vladimir Putin) (*personalism*)
- The absence of the working electoral processes (*electoral authoritarianism*)
- Strong hierarchical *vertical power system*

The role of the president and the hierarchical vertical organization of power are the most important *rules of the (memory) game* as well.

This general outline is very important in the discussion of the issues of the field of memory in Russia. If we follow Olick's idea of the field (in a Bourdieuvian sense) we should consider the dominant meta-field of power which strongly influences other fields (including the field of the

⁶ March 18, 2018 was the day of presidential elections in Russia. Vladimir Putin won them and became the president of the country for the fourth time (2008-2012 he was prime minister) with a 76% of votes. The main oppositional candidate (Alexey Navalny) got probation before the campaign and hence was not allowed to participate in elections in accordance with Russian law.

memory production⁷. By looking at rules which were depicted by Gelman it becomes evident that the main decisions in this meta-field of power are dependent on one particular person – Vladimir Putin, but in accordance with the vertical system of power all his statements (including his public speeches) should be transitioned to the lower levels of power.

The possibilities for an alternative are found even in the more state controlled countries (Watson, 1994) and an ethnographical stance at this power systems helps to see more possibilities for a resistance even in these authoritarian societies. As Sherry Ortner writes in her critique of resistance studies: *Resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity – the intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors engaged in these dramas* (Ortner, 1995). Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (2008) in her discussion of the power system in USSR also sees the state and even a totalitarian one not as a solid totalizing actor, but pays more attention to a particular bureaucrats and analyzes their practices from an anthropological point of view. As she writes: *«the Party bureaucracy was a way of life, with its own ideals and intimacies, its places, its habits, and its horizons»*. Katherine Verdery (1995) comes to the same conclusion about weakness of this type of power system analyzing Ceausescu's Romania. She writes that centralization of power makes the state dependent on local actors in the implementation of the concrete policies; there is no full control over the lower levels of bureaucratic apparatus. I assume that state officials in today's Russia on different power levels have their own life and this life is not fully controlled by Vladimir Putin – there is a certain level of autonomy.

Hence after understanding even the most general characteristic of the relations of power inside Russian state I can state that at least on the lower levels of power (for example regional political elites, municipalities etc.) there are possibilities for a dialogue between state and non-state actors.

⁷ The sub-field of the field of cultural production in Bourdieuvian sense.

1.2. The state and its History

Using Olick's approach we have to look not only at the meta-field of power and field of memory and relations inside it, but also on different media of memory which are used by actors in these fields. Before looking at the content of the official historical narrative produced by Vladimir Putin and upper level of Russian political elites we need also to understand the connection between the field of power and the field of memory production and specifically to look at particular instruments (media of memory) which Russian authoritarian state can use in order to create certain historical narrative.

The connection between these two fields are more evident if we look at how Gelman's distinction between coercive forces and *rules of the game* is similar to what Lois Althusser (2006) defines as repressive and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). One of the main features of ISAs is that they do not use violence to impose certain values. Althusser lists ISAs: religious educational, family, legal, political, trade-union, communications, cultural. If we add one more apparatus which is connected to the production of historical narratives or find this production in the functioning of other ISAs (for example, educational system or family) then this analytical instrument seems to be useful in the analysis of how state actors use past to impose particular values which are important for the continuity of their domination.

Some useful concepts are also developed in the field of nationalism studies which looks at the production of history in the name of the nation-building processes. Among the most important notions there are *invented traditions* (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012) – «*a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past*» and *imagined communities* by which Benedict Anderson explains the emergence of nationalism (Anderson, 2006), but for the current purposes it is more suitable to use concepts which are closer to the Russian context and to the politics of memory.

This term we can find in Alexey Miller's and Maria Lipman's book «Historical Policy in XXI Century» (Miller and Lipman, 2012) which was created on the basis of the analysis of post-soviet or post-socialist countries in Easter Europe. First of all, they state that in today's Russia we can see a lot of commemorations, opening ceremonies of monuments, symbolic acts, which are introduced and supported by the state. Alexey Miller defines these actions as *historical policy* – which means «*amplification of use of history for gaining political benefits which is common for all countries in Eastern Europe in the beginning of 21th century*» (Miller, 2012). Miller distinguishes *politics of memory* which he defines as a whole set of public strategies (state and also non state) connected to the past and *historical policy* which is characterized by the dominant state participation. This distinction fits well with the general discussion in the field of memory studies about the use of concepts *history* and *memory* (Klein, 2000). Pierre Nora (2002) explains the current use of memory instead of history. Among the reasons of this change he lists *democratization of History*. Usually writing History was the task of the states and only in 20th century with the powerful movements for the emancipation of people, ethnic groups, minorities, and in general the process of decolonization the concept of memory emerged. Hence considering Russian authoritarian context Miller distinguishes *historical policy* as a prerogative of the state while the general field of memory where different actors co-exist – *politics of memory*. So for the Russian context I develop Olick's concept of the field as the politics of memory (which also emphasizes the role of the field of power in this process) and define historical policy as the particular strategy of the state⁸.

⁸ There is also another similar concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu and used by Russian authors – symbolic policy which is based on the concept of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989). This concept means: *the use of different ways of interpretation of social reality in order to impose certain dominant values* (Malinova, 2012). The concept of historical policy seems more relevant for the current work because it focuses especially on the use of the past.

The only problem which remains unresolved is how to name other actors which resist the state in its domination. For the current thesis I will use the word *alternative* to talk about particular projects which deal with memory of political repressions⁹.

Alexei Miller says that historical policy is implemented by the use of special practices or instruments (media of memory) (Miller, 2012). I will briefly list these media and show the variety of ways how the state uses them by particular examples (in footnotes):

- (1) Founding research memory institutes, centers and other organizations¹⁰
- (2) Founding new museums¹¹
- (3) Legal regulation¹²
- (4) Educational regulation¹³
- (5) Media control¹⁴
- (6) Printing of travel guidebooks (in this sphere Russian state is not that developed and active)
- (7) Use of symbolic practices¹⁵

⁹ In explanation for this definition it is important considering the fact that the memory of totalitarian past and especially the memory of the state crimes in today's Russian authoritarian context is an alternative although in different context it is necessary to develop better terminology in order to discuss the variety of actors in the field of memory.

¹⁰ «Russian Military-Historical Society» was founded in 2012 by Vladimir Putin. The main aim of this organization is to «research and popularize Russian military history» as well as to «preserve cultural artefacts of such history». Another example is «Russian Historical Society» which aims to objectively study, and popularize national and world history and to preserve national memory. These organizations are important state instruments of historical policy.

¹¹ Very recent example is an exhibition «Russia – my history» which was opened in many Russian cities (the content is the same) and organizers of this project *«have done everything to make Russian history go from the category of black and white textbook to a bright, fascinating and at the same time objective narrative, so that every visitor feels involved in the events of more than a thousand-year history of his Motherland»*

¹² The part of the administrative law about «Propaganda or public demonstration of Nazi attributes».

¹³ A big debate around the new unified textbook of Russian history for schools.

¹⁴ This problem is very broad, but one example is that after the poll with the critical question to the Siege of Leningrad which Russian independent TV channel «Rain» posted in its live broadcasting the TV channel faced a lot of pressure including removing from the TV broadcasting and it had to switch to pay wall.

At this moment instruments which Russian state actors can use are listed and the main power actor is evident (Vladimir Putin). The task is to look at what exactly is used to understand the content of the dominant historical narrative in Russia – which alternatives are compatible with it and which are not. It is possible to analyze Putin's orders and discussions about different educational, cultural, family and other issues which are connected to the historical policy but the most convenient way how to see his position is to look at symbolic practices which he performs by himself and in particular his speeches during different symbolically important events.

1.3. Vladimir Putin's rhetoric

Olga Malinova (2012) presents a good analysis of presidential speeches for the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. She states that this event is important articulation of the state values, evaluation of the completed work and visions of the future that's why it helps us to understand the symbolic policy of the current power holders. Malinova traces presidential speeches from 1994 till 2010¹⁶ and makes several important conclusions: First of all, presidential speeches addresses recent past more often than previous epochs or centuries. Secondly, recent past is usually described with critical stance while positive sides of Russian history are found in the thousands of years of Russian history. Thirdly, association with the Victory in the Second World War is the most articulated positive historical events in presidential speeches. Additionally Malinova writes: *«Due to political considerations, the country's leadership should not work with the "difficult" past and evade formulating an official position on the disputable issues that divide Russian society»*. These conclusions are very important for the current work because they make us see which past is the dominant for the state, used and supported by this state (the Victory narrative) and which is not («difficult» past). The first important implication from this is that presidents do not protect or restore «difficult» aspects of Russian history; they simply do not touch upon these topics.

¹⁵ This is one of the most important instruments partly because it is connected with the participation of the main power actor Vladimir Putin who unveils monuments and participates in other commemoration rituals.

¹⁶ During this period Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999), Vladimir Putin (2000-2008, 2012-present) and Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012) were presidents of Russian Federation.

It was noted in the Introduction that the contradiction between the Victory narrative and the narrative about political repressions is connected to the role of Stalin who participated in both historical processes: the victory and repressions. One important feature of Putin's rhetoric is that if we look at the several recent speeches during May 9 Victory parades (2017-2018) we will hear words about war veterans, Russian people, Russian soldiers and generals, a lot of words about our allies which are now sometimes forget about a country which saved Europe and the whole world from Nazis, but we will not find the name of Joseph Stalin in this rhetoric. In Putin's words Stalin did not win the war: it was rather won by the united Russian people, Russian soul and even almost by Putin himself (at least he fights for the true history of the war with his current enemies).

In October 2017 at the unveiling ceremony of the memorial for the victims of political repressions in Moscow – «The Wall of Grief»¹⁷ he also gave speech and mentioned all categories of repressed people, emphasized on the importance of these memorials, said about the importance of debates about memory, denied any explanation of repressions by artificial people's need and thanked to the author of the memorial,¹⁸ but again he did not name even one person who can be blamed for these repressions – we did not hear the name of Stalin or other executors at all.

This absence of Joseph Stalin in Putin's rhetoric about the Victory and about political repressions makes irrelevant historical fact and contradiction which is about the dual character of Joseph Stalin as a historical figure who won the war and killed a lot of people – no, Stalin did not win the Second World War and did not kill people, at least the dominant power actor (and hence the dominant memory producer) in Russia does not say so.

¹⁷ Even the mere existence of this event shows the complexity of the historical policy of the state. (the role of this monument will be discussed further, because it was a big step in the struggle for the memory of political repressions in Russia).

¹⁸ He also declared his current political aims and his general idea about stability and trust which may be connected to the elections which were supposed to be (and happened with his win) in March

Two main implications can be made after the discussion about the role of state actors in the politics of memory in Russia. First of all, the authoritarian Russian state is not a solid phenomenon, it consists of different actors and even if the president is one of the most influential actors other bureaucrats also have agency on the lower level of power. Secondly, by looking at the memory of political repressions in Russia we see that it is underrepresented or even absent in the rhetoric of the main power actor. Hence by looking at these factors together I can state that alternative memorial projects which work with the whole field of power (not the federal power only) on the one hand have chances to be created and developed, but on the other hand they do have a precarious position in their communication with the federal state which is silent about this past and also in their relations with the lower power levels where bureaucrats are autonomous and often do not know how to react. The Last Address project is exactly in this position where the possibility to develop is evident but requires serious struggle in a highly precarious position.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL REPRESSIONS, REHABILITATION AND COMMEMORATIONS BEFORE THE LAST ADDRESS

In this chapter we will continue answering the question about the possibilities for an alternative memorial landscape to be created but will move closer to a particular case of the Last Address memorial project and the memory of political repressions in Russia. First of all it is essential to provide at least basic information about the phenomenon which is the subject of memorialization so the historical note about political repressions in USSR will be given. Secondly the history of rehabilitation and commemoration and other memorial practices of this event will be presented starting from the Soviet times (briefly) till the start of the project in the end of 2013: main actors, key events (including law regulations) and processes will be discussed¹⁹. So after this chapter we can have all important contexts to focus on the project itself.

2.1. Political repressions and rehabilitation process in USSR

Elena Zhemkova and Arseniy Roginsky in their work (2016) present the newest statistical data about victims of political repressions, outline main features of these repressions and provide chronology of the key historical events which are connected to the history of repressions, rehabilitation of victims and commemoration processes.

Authors understand repressions in accordance with the Law of the Russian Federation No. 1761-1 "On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression" of October 18, 1991 as «deprivation of life or freedom, placement for compulsory treatment in psychiatric medical institutions, expulsion from the country and deprivation of citizenship, eviction of groups of people from places of residence, special resettlement, involvement in forced labor in conditions of restriction of freedom, and other deprivation or restriction of the rights and freedoms ...». The whole system of labor camps and prisons was created known as GULAG (literal translation of the abbreviation is the Chief Administration of Camps).

¹⁹ This part of the work is especially important considering dialogical approach suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin and used by Olick.

First of all Roginsky and Zhemkova (2016) distinguish five main features of the political terror in USSR:

- (1) Incredible scale of terror. According to the data known at this moment which is not yet fully researched and collected the number of politically repressed people in Soviet Union is 11-11,5 million. Authors state that the data is not complete, so this number surely is not less, but may be higher.
- (2) Very long period of repressions. Four or five generations of soviet people were subjects to the terror.
- (3) Political repressions were not spontaneous or accidental: this process was undertaken by the repressive machines of the Soviet Union (among two most known are KGB – the Committee for State Security and NKVD – the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) but all decisions and big campaigns were sanctioned by the Political Bureau of the CPSU (Communist Party of Soviet Union).
- (4) Categorical character – repressions were focused on particular categories of population in different campaigns: peasants, doctors, army officers etc.
- (5) Non-legal character of repressions: a lot of different artificial reasons were created to realize these actions.
- (6) Ideological support of these campaigns: *«For many decades, the mind of the population persistently adopted the idea of enemies - external and internal, about the heroic struggle with these enemies, led by the party and security agencies, about the duty of every Soviet person to take part in this struggle, etc»*. Authors state that consequences of this ideological policy are evident even today.

This list is a very good summary of the main features of the political terror undertaken by the state in USSR, but I would add just one comment to the fourth point made by Roginsky and Zhemkova – categorical character of repressions. Alexander Etkind (2013) discusses the

difference between political repressions in USSR and Holocaust in Germany. He states that Holocaust was focused on particular groups of people with a very strict pseudo-scientific explanation, while political repressions in Soviet Union were dependent on the current political need of the rulers of the country and were not only focused on a particular categories of people but covered almost all categories of soviet population: professional and social groups (politicians, bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, intelligentsia, peasants, soldiers and officers), national groups (Germans, Poles, Kalmucks, Karachais, Balkars, Ingush, Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Koreans, Greeks, Finns), religious groups, age groups (including children) and also KGB officers who executed repressions themselves were killed afterwards – and it is to name just a few.

The beginning of political repressions for authors is the Bolsheviks take-over in October 1917 (October Revolution) when members of oppositional parties and independent civil organization were imprisoned or killed in a few years of Bolshevik's rule. During the civil war (1917-1922/23) a lot of people were also repressed as well as in the period of collectivization (1920s and 1930s) when a large numbers of peasants were removed from their places and oppressed in many different ways. The most active phase of political repressions was under the rule of Joseph Stalin (from late 1920s till his death in 1953). 1937-1938 years are known as the Great Terror when 936 750 (1937) and 638 509 (1938) people were arrested; the period of 1931-1933 is also very cruel but does not have a name: 479 065 (1931), 410 433 (1932) and 505 256 (1933) people were arrested as well as during the war time 1943-1946 (594 185 people were repressed).

Rehabilitation

The year 1953 and the death of Joseph Stalin (March 5) was a very important year which signified the end of mass scale terror in USSR and the start of rehabilitation process. The 20th Congress of the CPSU (1956) is a significant event because the new leader of the country Nikita Khrushchev gave a «Secret speech» and denounced the cult of personality and dictatorship of

Joseph Stalin. The period of rehabilitation began and Roginsky and Zhemkova (2016) provide us with their periodization, they distinguish 4 periods of the rehabilitation process:

1953 – 1961 – Authors describe this period of rehabilitation as politically motivated with the aim of legitimizing the new power holders (Khrushchev himself), but also note that main implications were *«the release of prisoners and the awakening of public consciousness, which had many consequences»*.

Under the Brezhnev rule rehabilitation did not stopped, it continued «in a declarative way» but its political significance was completely lost (1962 – 1983). The new era of Glasnost (1988 – 1991) brought the topic of terror and political repressions in the public space and its political significance also rose. In 1988-1989 the organization «Memorial» (which is existent today) was founded and started dealing with this topic and other civil rights movements in USSR and further in Russia. A lot of legislative actions were taken during this period along with ideas to install the monument in memory of victims and the state was very enthusiastic about this process (big memorial in memory of victims in the center of Moscow was installed only in 2017); a lot of people were rehabilitated at this moment and the big Law is started preparing with the active participation of civic organizations including the Memorial. In general authors conclude: *«the era of Gorbachev was a major breakthrough in the comprehension of the past and, in particular, in rehabilitation»*.

One of the most important achievements of the latest period is the Law of the Russian Federation No. 1761-1 "On the rehabilitation of victims of political repressions" of October 18, 1991 (it is strange that authors put 1992 as the starting year for this period). This Law has a definition of political repressions (it was given in the beginning of this part), clear chronological frames (1917-1991), contains strict definition of the victim of repressions and as a part of rehabilitation process offers several financial compensations or the return of the lost property. Despite the fact that this Law is very influential step in the process of rehabilitation of victims, it does not provide any mechanisms of commemoration of victims.

Several civic organizations (the Memorial is the leader in this field) continue to discuss this Law and have a dialogue with the state about additional chapters there. For example, it is not always clear whether or not KGB officers who participated in repressions should be rehabilitated if they were repressed afterwards. Among the most critical problems Roginsky and Zhemkova list: (1) the absence of the chapter connected to the commemoration of victims – creation of monuments, museums, other memorial practices, (2) the restrictions with the archival work which are not stated in the Law because at this moment it is extremely expensive and sometimes impossible to get the information about a particular person and several other additions, but for the further discussion these two are the most important. It is important to note that despite the fact that the Law does not contain substantive commemoration program, in accordance with this Law the Day of Memory of Victims of Political Repressions was established on October 30²⁰ and since then it is the most important day of memory connected to the topic.

The conclusion of authors about the role of the Law is not that optimistic: *«But this is the first and important step in assessing the Soviet regime, and it has remained the only one. Since power belongs to history instrumentally, it sometimes recalls victims according to its interests, but mostly prefers not to talk about them».*

2.2. Commemorations of victims in 1990s, 2000s and the first part of 2010s

I think that it is important to mention several important events which are connected to the memory of political repressions and the Last Address project but were not discussed by Roginsky and Zhemkova in their work. Despite the fact that the state does not have a program of commemoration, some actions are taken place and the dialogue with the state is also continued.

An important process was initiated by the Memorial in 1998 – they started to create a big database from different regional «Books of Memories»²¹ and now this data is available in the

²⁰ This date is connected to the first political action which was taken place on October 30, 1974 by several dissidents who were imprisoned in labor camps at that moment (Rusina, 2003).

²¹ Different local activists in many Russian regions and professionals from the Memorial have collected the data about repressed people since late 1980s when a lot of archives opened. All information was

electronic version – base.memo.ru/. This database contains around 3 million names, but in the introductory article to this database authors state that this is only around 20% of all repressed people (2016). This database is the basic archival resource for the Last Address project that is why it was important to discuss it here: among 3 million names in this database, 400 thousands have the indication of the address where they lived – the project works with these names.

Another ways of commemoration are presented in the already mentioned book written by Alexander (2013). His main focus of analysis is «soft» forms of memory (literature, oral traditions, and discussions) but he also traces the history of other forms of commemorations including monuments, museums and memorials. The first monument was created in 1989 when the group of activists and Viniamin Ioffe (one of the founders of the Memorial) installed a simple granite boulder in the cemetery of the Solovetsky Monastery (former Solovki prison). Another stone was installed in the center of Moscow in 1990. In 2002 the same stone was unveiled in Saint-Petersburg. «The Solovetsky Stone» which is still located in Lubyanka Square in Moscow (in front of the KGB headquarters and near the demolished monument of the founder of the Soviet Secret Service Police Felix Dzerzhinsky) is a stone which was brought from the location of Solovki prison camp as well. This monument was the first in a row of monuments in memory of the victims of political repressions in different places in Russia, but there are mainly stones and local memorials on the places of former camps (like Solovki) or shooting ranges, but not the state sanctioned big memorials and memory projects.

Etkind (2013) provides an analysis of these monuments and first of all he states that the majority of them are abstract (there are a lot such stones and local initiatives in Russia – 1140), they do not depict any information about people who were repressed and also do not show struggle or fighting for freedom, they show mourning instead. This fact emphasizes the importance and uniqueness of the Last Address plaques which contain information about repressed people.

collected in the «Books of Memories» which contain mainly the names of people and little information about them.

An important distinction in memory of political repressions for Etkind is the distinction between «soft» and «hard» media of memory. He states that texts, discussions, oral traditions and Internet spaces are more able to trace the memory; they are more flexible and speedy than monuments, memorials and museums; and also texts and discussions are performative; there are more dialogues in «soft» media memory. Etkind shows a good example when these types of memory can coexist. Near the Solovetski stone in Moscow people gather to read aloud names of victims from the «Books of Memories» (one by one) every October 30 – the name of the action is «The Return of Names». Etkind writes: *«Monument becomes the place of the social ritual where the hard construction connects to the ceremonial texts and performative acts, creating organized, politically important act of memory»*. His discussion allows us to look at the Last Address project also as a coexistence of these types of commemoration and we will look at how it is done in the following sections.

An important moment for the politics of memory in Russia is indicated by Alexei Miller (2014) who states that after the failed trial over the Communist party in 1993 the state for a long time stopped to participate in the politics of memory till the beginning of 2000s and the emphasis on the Victory in the war. As Miller states the historical policy in 2000s was a reaction to the intensification of the use of history in Eastern European countries which based their national identities on the denial of the Soviet past²². For Russia it was impossible to base its new identity on the full denial of the Soviet past because the dominant narrative about the Victory, so in order to resist Eastern European historical policies Russian state started to create its own. Miller describes 2000s politics of memory in Russia as almost fully dominated by the historical policy of the state. Russian state used all instruments of the use of history which we have listed above.

Important changes happened during the rule of Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012) when the role of civil society and independent actors increased. Under the pressure of independent media the idea

²² One of the most explicit examples of historical policy in Eastern European countries is Polish Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation which has lustration and prosecution prerogatives. The Institute was established in 1998.

of the universal history textbook for schools failed, also «since 2010, there was a decline in activity of the "wars of the past" that Russia waged with Poland, Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltic states in 2004-2009» (Miller, 2014) and several important speeches were given by Dmitri Medvedev who declared his anti-Stalinist position. In 2018 some journalists remember this period as Medvedev Thaw in accordance with the period known as Khrushchev Thaw (after the death of Stalin in 1953) which also included the beginning of rehabilitation processes.

Even after the return of Vladimir Putin in 2012 some tendencies which started during the Medvedev's rule continued. It is important to note several important official initiatives. An important role in these processes played The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights which was created in 2004²³ and several people there including the head of the council Mikhail Fedotov. In 2011 members of this council offered an idea to create the state program of commemorations of victims of political repressions and hence to create the monument in the center of Moscow. Dmitri Medvedev gave an order to create a working commission on this question. In 2014 the commission offered this program to Vladimir Putin and he signed it. This was an important step which also led to the creation of the memorial in Moscow in 2017 – the Wall of Grief. The Last Address project has started in 2013-2014 and in the next chapters we will continue to look at the politics of memory in Russia but with an emphasis on the project.

In this summary of the key historical periods in repression, rehabilitation and commemoration processes in USSR and Russia I showed the scope and the complexity of the topic of political repressions. I think that we can compare political repressions in USSR with the Holocaust in its cruelty and scope, but the memory of these events in Europe and in Russia are very different; as it was noted above Russian state does not address this topic much (or does it instrumentally only)

²³ The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights is a «consultative body established to assist the President in the exercise of his constitutional responsibilities to guarantee and protect human rights and freedoms, keep the President informed on the situation in this area, facilitate development of civil society institutions in Russia, and draft proposals for the President on matters within its mandate» (<http://en.kremlin.ru/structure/councils#institution-18>).

and focuses mainly on the glorious historical events such as the Victory instead. Actors and events described in this chapter will help us to see the connections with the Last Address memorial project which will be presented in details in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF THE LAST ADDRESS AND ITS TACTICS IN THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN RUSSIA

I think that the general contextualization of the Soviet political repressions and the description of the politics of memory in Russia have been provided and we can focus on the Last Address project itself. In this chapter I will continue providing an answer for the first research question and partly touch the second question of how this project changes the politics of memory in Russia and how exactly it works. Firstly we will look at how this project was created in 2013-2014 and then discuss main aspects of its work. The discussion in this chapter will be focused on the macro level of the project work which means communication with the state actors, organizational structure, ideological position, financial resources and operation in the system of Russian law.

The author of the Last Address project is Russian journalist, publisher and civic activist Sergey Parkhomenko (born 1964). He has a radio-show on the large country-wide media «Echo of Moscow»; he was among leaders of massive oppositional protests in 2011-2013 after the parliament and presidential elections in Russia; he is a co-founder of the anti-plagiarism networking community «Dissernet», author of the social movement «Society of Blue Buckets» which is against privileges of cars with flashing lights (used by officials), participant, founder and manager of other social and business activities in Russia including the Last Address.

The Last Address is inspired by the European (started in Germany) project «Stumbling stones» which aims to commemorate victims of Holocaust; it was created by the German artist Gunter Demnig. These stones (it is not a metaphor) are installed in the stone-block pavement near the house which is known as the last address of the Holocaust victim; on the surface of these stones there is a very brief information about this person (name and dates). Sergey Parkhomenko physically stumbled on these stones several times in different European cities and in the end of 2013 decided to transfer this idea to Russia where, as he says people had their «own Holocaust» – political repressions in USSR.

As he explained he went to discuss this idea to the organization Memorial – one of the largest organizations in Russia which has dealt with the topic of political repressions and other civil rights problems in Russia since late 1980s. Memorial had several projects connected to the memory of political repressions and in 2013 started the project «Topography of the Terror – Moscow» which is about urban memory of the terror in Moscow. One of the main resources of this organization is a big database with different subsections containing information about people who were repressed during Soviet times. The Memorial also liked Parkhomenko's initiative. He explains: *«I met with the leaders of the Memorial – Arseniy Roginsky, Elena Zhemkova and Jan Rachinsky and we decided to organize a conference, a workshop, to discuss all the problems: substantive, ideological and technical»* (interview with Sergey Parkhomenko (SP)).

This conference took place in December 2013 at the «Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design» during two full weekends; 70-80 participants took part in the discussions: journalists, historians, civil rights activists, architects, designers, archivists. These people were divided into 2 big groups: one discussed historical, ideological, legal and other aspects of the project while another group of architects and designers created the model of the memorial plaque and debated around technical questions of the installation. There were several important discussions and some of them will be mentioned further as well as other aspects of the work of the project in order to understand the tactics of the project which it uses to operate in the politics of memory in Russia.

3.1. Definitional aspects

I suppose that one of the reasons why this project is alive is the special understanding of political repressions which is actually not that contradictory to the main historical policy. One of the first questions of the conference in December 2013 was about the definition and periodization of repressions: when did they start and finished and who should be considered as repressed? In this part of the discussion we can understand the role of the 1991 Law "On the rehabilitation of victims of political repressions" which states that political repressions started on October 25 (old

style), 1917 and were implemented till the date of the approval of this Law (October 18, 1991)²⁴.

The definition of the repression in accordance with this Law we have already discussed above and it is very broad: it is not focused on the period of Stalin's rule only, but on the whole Soviet period. Such a broad definition and periodization of political repressions help the project to communicate (or rather not communicate) with the state. We have already discussed that the main historical narrative which is used by the state is Victory in the war. As Sergey Parkhomenko explains: *«This rhetoric about the Victory is very connected to the rhetoric about the positive role of Stalin in Russian history» ... «but our project is not anti-Stalinist project only – it is broader, it is anti-totalitarian»* (SP). I think that the chosen periodization and the main idea which is formulated as anti-totalitarian (not directly against Stalin) help this project to operate in the field of memory politics in Russia where the narrative of the Victory (emphasized by Putin) and the Stalinist narratives which are connected to this Victory by other state-affiliated actors are influential.

3.2. «In the ideological sense it is incorrect to ask money from the state» – Financial aspects of the Project

One of the main statements of the project is that it is vernacular and does not need state sponsorship. It is organized in a way which allows collecting money directly from people. The cost of the plate is 4000 rubles (60 euro) is paid by the applicant. Basically the person who wants to install the plate send money to the project and get the service which includes the cost of the plate itself (4000 rubles), archival work (job of archivists), receiving the consent from the owners of the façade (job of volunteers) and other related costs (web-site, office etc.). Of course, this 4000 rubles is not enough to continue working and that's why the project also crowdfunds money in different ways. In order to financially operate the project organized the Fund «The Last Address» in April 2014.

²⁴ I can also note that the fact that today's civic activists use the key formulations of the Law from 1991 show the significance of the debates in 1990s where the dialogue between the state leaders (Mikhail Gorbachev personally participated in this discussion) and civil society (including Memorial) was very active.

Another important financial resource is donations from different private donors and non-governmental organizations and funds. This part of the crowdfunding campaign is not an easy task:

«I should say that not all donors want to be on our web-site, some of them want keep confidential» ... «Especially banks which are very dependent on relations with local administrations, because they need to open branches, place advertisements etc. » ... «They told me: "We do not know whether you are approved or not, your status is unclear. Whether you are doing well, or not"» (SP).

Some of the sponsors are indicated on the web-site: Yeltsin Center (Foundation "Presidential Center BN. Yeltsin"), «Private Charitable Foundation of Mikhail Prokhorov» and brand company «Bosco Di Ciliegi Group of Companies» but some of them are not – we do not know who else sponsors this memorial project.

In 2014 after facing difficulties showed in the previous paragraph the project started the campaign on the crowdfunding platform «Planeta» and collected 1 485 226 rubles for the start of the project: creation of the web-site and salary for the team for the first period.

In general, we can say that the financial organization chosen by the project in some aspects is independent from the state (the cost of the plate is covered by the applicant) but still the big part of financial structure is dependent on the state. Many banks and other businesses are dependent on the state and are afraid of political and financial consequences which are connected to the sponsorship of the project.

3.3. Archival work

Another aspect in which the project has to communicate with state actors is the archival work. This task is constantly undertaken by archivists of the project who work with the database of the Memorial and with the data provided by applicants. This procedure varies on the basis of the person in whose memory the plate is installed; there are many different scenarios like when

he/she was shot, departed, placed in labor camp, replaced from one camp to another, rehabilitated etc. At the first stage archivist checks the information in the database of the Memorial and in the Internet in different «Books of Memories»; then if everything is found on the previous stage archivist makes a request to the archives of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSS) to find the date of rehabilitation (it is not usually written in the «Books of memories»). But in a lot of cases the first stages requires much more efforts and the data has to be requested in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia (MIA) or in public archives. With the FSS archive it is easier to work than with the archive of the IMR. In order to obtain information about one person in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, you need to provide a notarized certified copy of the passport with all pages, which costs 1000 rubles – financially it is very difficult to afford. One of the archivists of the projects states that in the previous years this regulation about the passport was not so strictly performed; bureaucrats in the MIA accepted requests without this copy of the passport. From March 1, 2018 public archives also require you to pay if you want to take a photo of the material (not even scanning).

«This is not a problem of our particular project. This is more general problem of the restricted access to the information about political repressions in USSR and to other archives as well. In general there are changes in the country in the direction of the information protection, closed nature of the society and the new terror». (interview with the archivist in Saint-Petersburg).

This aspect of the work of the project as well as recent news about the secret order to delete archival cards of repressed people shows us the seriousness of attempts of the state to control the information, to hide its history and even to delete inconvenient parts of it. We can say that the Last Address project unfortunately cannot do anything to find the decision of this problem by itself. From the recent example with the deleted archival cards it is evident that the role of media in this process is much more important because they make this case public and scandalous. On the other hand memorial projects which work with the state archives can depict the serious

problem; they can identify serious violations of the law or of bureaucratic procedures in the state work with archives and then media will transfer this information to the public.

3.4. From memorial plaque to informational plaque – Legal aspects of the project

Another important discussion during the conference in December 2014 was about legal status of plaques. Initiators of this project found a loophole in the Russian legal system in the part which regulates the ownership of facades in Russian cities. An important distinction between memorial plaques and informational plates should be explained. According to the Russian legislation if you want to install a memorial plaque you need to follow huge bureaucratic procedure and approve the design, the text and other parameters of the plaque in many different governmental structures. Another thing is that the person who is commemorated on the memorial plaque should be of outstanding personality and very important for the country's history while the idea of the Last Address is to commemorate different people independent of who they were, where they worked; they can be very modest people. The decision was found and it was to give another legal status for these plaques – from now on they are not memorial plaques but informational plaques:

«The status of these plaques is very modest – it is not a memorial plaque in memory of the great and famous historical figure. It is an informational plaque like the plaque with the message: Private road: No Parking. We inform people that the person lived here» (SP).

According to the project's interpretation of the law this kind of plates does not require approval by the municipality – the only consent needed is the consent of the owner/s of the façade²⁵. The project found a loophole which can be interpreted in this way or in another way that's why this trick on the one hand allows the project to operate but on the other hand creates another precarious situation because there is a possibility to interpret the law differently:

²⁵ An important addition is that if the building is a cultural heritage site the informational plate should be approved by the commission which is responsible for cultural heritage in a particular city.

«I asked 7 different officials about the status of these plates. Each of them provided very confidently own version of this status and how we should operate inside the legal system» (coordinator in Saint-Petersburg).

Anyway, there are different configurations of the ownership of buildings in Russian cities: the façade may be owned by the commercial structure (or several businesses), by the governmental structure (universities, libraries, other bureaucratic institutions), by residents of the building (in organized legal forms like Home Unit Company or without this legal form) and by different combinations of these owners. The task of the project volunteers is to come to these owners and receive a signature from them that they agree to install this plate on their façade. This part of the project work is the most difficult and time and people consuming but it allows the project to operate and communicate directly with owners. In contrast to other memorial projects (memorial plaques, monuments and memorials) which are dependent on the state approval the Last Address does not need this approval and can work on the level of the particular building.

The exact task for volunteers who work with the consent part is different in different cities and changes through time. For that moment the project coordinators in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg understood that the main task is not to fully follow the law (which is not clear) but to (1) have any kind of document which looks officially to show for anybody who is against the project or who has questions to it and to (2) understand the general atmosphere in the building – not to collect signatures from all residents because some of them may be against the installation, but to understand the extent in which people agree or disagree with the project: will they remove the plate or will they go to the court. This relational character of the law created a chance for the project to operate with this law basically as it wants but paying attention to the possible disagreement from citizens.

3.5. «We made all the necessary attempts to talk» – Communication with the State²⁶

One of important discussions during the conference in December, 2013 was connected to the contradiction between the state historical policy and the topic of the project: *«We clearly understood that it is not very trendy now and we go against state interests»* (SP). In the following section I will show how the project deals with this contradiction, which tactic it uses to be able to operate and not being attacked by the state on different power levels.

In the beginning of the project in December 2013 Sergey Parkhomenko started a dialogue with the vice-mayor of Moscow to discuss legal and other problems connected to the project. Vice-mayor Leonid Pechatnikov was very pleasant, enthusiastic and helpful when they met for the first time. He emphasized the importance of the Last Address and asked his servants to organize a commission to discuss the status of the project with its organizers and help them with other issues. This commission had several meetings in the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 (Sergey Parkhomenko and Elena Zhemkova from the Memorial participated), but: *«The main result of the work of this commission was the absence of any result»* (SP).

«In the spring of 2014, after the Crimea, when it became clear that this is becoming completely out of fashion, officials from the mayor's office said that, perhaps, we do not have any sense to gather more. Actually that's all. The next meeting of the commission did not happen. On the mood of officials it became clear that there was no need to pursue them anymore. There will be no more commissions» (SP).

Sergey Parkhomenko indicates the winter and spring of 2014 as an important change in the politics of the state in general and in the historical policy as well. Moscow city officials made it clear that the dialogue is not necessary anymore and the project used this situation to become even more independent:

²⁶ Capital S indicates that in this chapter the discussion will be focused on the federal state although formally not. Moscow city administration is formally independent but is very close to the president and federal power.

«It seems to me that they had a suspicion that we will not succeed. They thought that it would dissolve by itself. We decided to pretend to be a “dry bush” and pretend that we do not understand what they hint at» (SP).

The project chose the tactic of the «dry bush» which means to ignore all the hints from the state actors and to continue their work – it was risky and unpredictable.

One of the most important days in the history of the project is December 10, 2014 when first plates were installed in Moscow:

«On December 10, 2014 we came to the walls of the first building, the first address. We did not do a secret cooperative gathering; we did it all quite openly. We did not know what would happen: will any police come, will the police guard us or, on the contrary, drive us away from this building, or everyone will be arrested, or all will be thanked» (SP).

All informational plates were opened at this day and nobody was arrested, nobody came to stop this ceremony. This meeting is an important event in the further history of the project because it indicated several power actors who help the project till today and who came to the unveiling ceremony. The most influential person is the head of the Presidential Council for Human Rights Mikhail Fedotov, who has been already mentioned before as an important actor in the commemorations of victims of repressions in Russia. All officials who were also invited from the Moscow administration did not come.

As I have already shown the historical policy is very dependent on the international relations of the country (the first confrontation was with Eastern Europe in 2000s discussed in the previous chapter). 2014 events and changes in the politics of memory in Russia confirmed this assumption.

In the end of January there was a scandal about oppositional TV Channel Rain which posted a poll about the Siege of Leningrad with the formulation: "Was it possible to abandon Leningrad to the enemy in order to save hundreds of thousands of lives?" After this poll the channel was

removed from all TV broadcasting companies. On March 4 the professor of Moscow State University of International Affairs Andrey Zubov was fired because of his article comparing the annexation of Crimea with the annexation of Austria by Hitler in 1938. During the spring 2014 the museum Perm-36 which was organized in the former labor camp faced serious difficulties in the dialogue with the administration of Perm and stopped working. On May 5, 2014 the Law which provides an opportunity to imprison a person for the "dissemination of knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War" was signed by Vladimir Putin²⁷.

These events are just the beginning of the general trend which continued and led to the ban of «The Death of Stalin» film in fall 2017, creation of several monuments of Stalin in 2016-2017 and to the changes in the politics of memory in Russia. Alexei Miller (2017) had a very pessimistic assumption of the year 2014: *«It is very likely that in the historical perspective, 2014 will be perceived as the beginning of a sufficiently long process of mobilizing civil society on an anti-liberal, aggressively nationalistic platform»*.

In this situation it is very important to look at the Last Address project which was lucky to start working before the spring 2014, but after these events appeared in the more precarious situation:

«We proceed from the fact that at any moment we can wake up in the morning and find out that there are no more of our signs, they have all unscrewed it during the night. Maybe – so what? We immediately said to ourselves: We work because we work. And do not pay attention to anything. We will solve the problems as they arrive. If there is an attack, we will try to protect somehow» (SP).

This precarious situation is balanced by the support from the state-affiliated actors such as the head of the Presidential Council for Human Rights Mikhail Fedotov who came to the first opening ceremony in 2014. One of the most important actions of help is that in spring, 2016

²⁷ This Law was accepted by the Parliament and signed the president in a month (it required 3 rounds of discussions in Parliament) which is very fast for the criminal code laws and laws in general.

Sergey Parkhomenko was invited to the commission which is a part of the state program of commemorations of victims of political repressions²⁸. Commission signed the document which is known among the project participants as Kremlin protocol which states that the Last Address project correspond to the official program and should be welcomed by municipal and regional bureaucrats. Again we see the importance of some actors which are affiliated with the state but help civil society to emerge: this fact again emphasizes the importance of the chosen relational approach to the state and to the collective memory research.

3.6. Communication with the local power holders

It is evident now that the Last Address project does not work with the federal state. An important feature of the project is that it operates in the urban context and the most possible state actors with whom it can communicate are from the city administrative structures. In the previous sections of this chapter we have discussed the role of the Moscow city administration but the Last Address works in different cities and it is interesting to look at the tactics of the project in these different contexts. 2 scandalous examples will be briefly described and this scandalous character will help us to delineate the possibilities and limitations of the work in the particular city with particular city state actors:

May 31 2015 informational plate informing that in 1938 (CPSU)-party official Mikhail Bondarenko was taken from his flat on the street Petrovskaya, 37 in Taganrog and later shot. June 3 the plate was taken as well. There was no serious investigation who took newly installed plate but this case is interesting because of the debates on the city level about the status of plates of the Last Address project. Activists of the project (including one official from the City Duma) wanted to install a new plate instead of the stolen one but the City Duma (other members) worried about the status of these plates and intervened in the discussion. Several city commissions (urban development, constructions, and toponymy) tried to decide the legal status of the plate but after all discussions in commissions the final decision had to be made by the City

²⁸ This program started under the rule of Dmitri Medvedev (it was discussed in the previous chapter).

Duma. The director of the Memorial Arseniy Roginsky sent an official letter to the City Duma asking to approve the status of the informational plate (not the memorial plaque). City Duma organized a poll on their web-site asking people what do they think and the majority of participants from citizens of Taganrog agreed to decide by themselves about these plates on their buildings (which means they chose the status of the informational plate). Finally the Duma approved the status of the plate as an informational plate which was the bright success of the Last Address project in Taganrog and in general because the plate was re-installed and an important discussion took place among citizens and bureaucrats.

This case confirms the discussion about the possibilities which are hidden on the lower layers of power system in Russia. The City Duma of Taganrog, local activists and citizens discussed the problem and made a decision. It is also important to emphasize the role of the Memorial (and its director Arseniy Roginsky) as an influential organization which helped the project in this struggle in Taganrog.

In June 2017 a different story happened in Archangelsk, which is known now as the first case of the trial connected to the Last Address activity – and this case is not glorious for the Last Address. This time luckily the plate was not stolen or removed but the activist who organized the installation was fined by the court. The scandal was raised because the plate was installed at the cultural heritage site – old wooden building. The activist in his request to the commission of cultural heritage of Archangelsk *«did not specify the type of screws with which this plate is attached to the wall»* – this is the main claim from the commission. One day before the session of the court the Presidential Council for Human Rights sent an official letter of support to the activist Dmitri Kozlov, but this letter in contrast with the similar letter in Taganrog did not help much because Dmitri was found guilty and fined (15 000 rubles which is not a lot comparing to the maximum possible amount in this case – 200 000).

It is good that the court did not require removing the plate but it was made by anonymous people few months after the trial. Activists of the project connect this case with the atmosphere of the city as communist and Stalinist. In 2016 the monument of Joseph Stalin was installed in Archangelsk: *«We had a failure in Arkhangelsk. There are very strong Stalinist sentiments. The city is full of this mob»* (interview with coordinator in Saint-Petersburg).

These two cases show that to discuss the politics of memory in the context of Russian cities we should not only pay attention to the general historical policy of the state but to look at lower levels of power which have autonomy to decide in every case how to deal with this memory. Hence the memorial project which aims to work with this kind of inconvenient or inglorious memory should be very careful in their tactics in every particular city; this tactic is well expressed by one of the organizers in Saint-Petersburg:

«There must be a person (activist) who understands how the state functions in the city, and how the most important stage (receiving consent) must be passed» ... «At some point, you just need to push through, take responsibility by analyzing the actions of the authorities» (interview with the coordinator in Saint-Petersburg).

In general I can state that it is definitely possible for this kind of alternative projects to operate in the context of the strong historical policy implemented by the state even after 2014: in this chapter I have showed several possibilities and limitations of the work of the project. The project created a financial model which helps to collect big amount of money directly from citizens but another donors such as businesses and private funds are still controlled by the state and are not easily ready to donate money. The archival work is also under the state control and the project archivists cannot find an effective way to avoid communication with the state actors. A good possibility for the project to operate (especially after 2014) is the chosen periodization which it works with: it is not directly contradictory to the state historical policy because addresses broader topic (not against Stalin but anti-totalitarian in general).

I think that the most ambitious possibility which the project found is the loophole in the Russian law which allows communicating directly with citizens. As it was shown by the cases of Taganrog and Archangelsk this work should be made very accurately and with the understanding of the power relations in each case but it is possible to avoid state in this work. Aspects of this direct communication with citizens will be discussed in the last chapter of the thesis.

CHAPTER 4: CITIZENS, EMOTIONS AND COMMUNITY

In this chapter I will finally show how the Last Address project changes the current politics of memory in Russia on micro level by implementing democratic practices such as direct communication with residents to receive their consent. First of all it is important to put this aspect of the work of the Last Address project into broader context of similar projects to better understand its features in a particular Russian context. Secondly I will show that describing the person who is to be commemorated and emphasizing the role of the place (*this happened in your flat!*) cause the emotional reaction of residents so they agree to install the plaque. Thirdly, I will present the features of the opening ceremonies and describe how the project builds sustainable community around the memory of political repressions. Finally, I will show that some features of Russian context in contrast to the revised literature create obstacles for the project to better mediate the memory of political repressions.

4.1 Media of memory in the urban landscape

In the very beginning of the thesis Jeffrey Olick (2007) told about the importance of the concept of the field in which the contestation and change of collective memory happens (we discussed this in previous chapters) but also Olick emphasized the very important role of media of memory. Literature which describes the processes of the production and reproduction of the urban memorial landscape distinguishes the official media of memory and the vernacular ones (counter memorials) (Stangl, 2008).

Media of memory is not an object again (not the plaque on the wall), but the whole process of the transition of the message. Cecily Harris (2010) characterizes counter memorials as memorials with anti-presentational character, which are successful in establishing non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian relations with the audience. If we compare the Last Address plaques with the big statue of Vladimir the Great, which was unveiled by Vladimir Putin in 2016²⁹ we will clearly see

²⁹ Vladimir the Great (not Putin himself) – the 10th-century ruler of Kiev Russia who adopted Orthodox Christianity from Byzantine

the difference in the contrast in size between an observer and the statue, we will see that monument is fenced and placed in the center of the square and a lot of lights are around. In contrast to that the Last Address plaques are at the eye level, not fenced and not lightened, they are very close to the observer. This is what Harris describes. There is a big discussion about the proximal features of counter memorials. For example, Dydia DeLyser (1999) shows that people have strong connections to places with special versions of the past. She writes about emotional and healing features of the memorials.

These features of counter memorials may be developed by adding studies about the Stumbling stones project in Europe. Gould and Silverman (2013) shows that such counter memorials engage the participant into the experience of time and memory which are in constant mix: *the evolution of the individual and collective memory as a democratic form of remembrance happens through this experience with counter memorials*. Another study of the Stumbling stones project (Cook, van Riemsdijk, 2014) tells that individuals transform urban memorial landscape through (1) emotional responses to the past at the opening ceremony, (2) emphasizing the significance of the specific victim and (3) giving symbolic meanings by encountering with stones in their everyday activities.

It is interesting to see, first, how the Last Address project transmits its message, and which tactics of this process really work. In the case of the Last Address, unlike the memorials outlined above, the message is transmitted not only when a person encounters the plaque and looks at it (which in my research is not explored), and not only through participation in the opening ceremony – a significant part of the transmission process is a direct communication between the volunteers of the project and local residents, which will be discussed in this chapter.

4. 2. Personalized memory and the democratic change

The Last Address project works with the memory of political repression in USSR, but in contrast to the Wall of Grief (large memorial in Moscow) and other monuments in Russia which we have discussed in previous chapters (Etkind, 2013) the plaque is not an abstract representation – it is

very concrete and personal; it contains information about one particular person and it is sanctioned by the one particular person who paid for the plaque. Volunteers prepare for the concrete building knowing that the emotional part of the process which is connected to the personality of the person is important: *«I try to print all the documents about this person, about his life, his story, and it is important to have a photo to show to people»* (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

From interviews it is evident that residents are more actively engaged in the conversation when the volunteer starts talking not about statistics of repressions, numbers of killed and arrested people, not about population but about a particular person, who lived in USSR, who did his or her job and who was arrested without any reason:

The clash is between emotional and rational. Our project translates the whole story from statistics into the realm of personal experience (volunteer in Moscow)

An important aspect of this emotional attachment to the person is the fact that there are people who want to honor the memory of their repressed relative:

«Then the emotional work starts. People react when we say, for example, that the granddaughter is waiting, she wants to commemorate her grandparents» (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

«When relatives want to help in the process of receiving consent it is very helpful, it is very powerful. Residents are more active in talking when they stand in front of relatives» (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

«When we talked for the first time to receive the consent they were very unpleasant and indifferent, but at the opening ceremony they greeted relatives and invited them to drink tea in their flat – their behavior completely changed» (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

This is exactly what Cook and van Riemsdijk (2014) tell when they discuss how individuals transform urban memorial landscape – when the historical policy is about heroes and glorious events, the Last Address is about ordinary people. This is also evident from the discussion of

legal aspects: memorial plaque which is sanctioned by the state is one legal status and informational plaque is another, more democratic, changing the memorial landscape of the city.

4.3. Proximity and the democratic change

From interviews it is also evident that the project also chose another important strategy how to emotionally attach people to the memory of repressions – by the proximity. One more tactic of volunteers which is related to the proximity is to show the plaque itself – it is palm-sized and it is possible for volunteers to carry it with them:

I also carry this plaque with me, the defective one. It helps to explain what we are doing and usually people are interested when they see the plaque itself (volunteer in Moscow)

It is not a usual experience for people to take the monument in their hands – this closer distance of counter memorials and larger in case of official ones was indicated by Cecily Harris in her comparison of the two.

Another aspect about proximity is that many people completely change their attitude toward this project when they understand that this crime happened in their house, in their flat:

I could not enter the building and waited on the street, but then I decided to call to the apartment (through intercom) from which he was taken. It worked and now I usually do this. The woman at first did not want to talk but when I said this information to her, she changed! I learned from her that this apartment has an unhappy fate – she lost her husband and her son died, she lost – she then told me her whole life (volunteer in Saint Petersburg).

Moreover they not just open the door and sign the consent form; sometimes people react more enthusiastically and start to explain their life experiences through the story of the repressed person:

They (two residents) exited from the building and at first shouted something unpleasant but then when they somehow heard that his person was taken from their flat and that he was occultist – they completely changed their

mind, invited everybody to their apartment and then told us about their interests in occultism and other magic (volunteer from Moscow).

Alexander Etkind (2013) in his discussion of the memorialization of the terror in Russia points out the fact that monuments and memorials about political repressions are not placed instead of the Soviet monuments but nearby which characterize the coexistence of both regimes (for example Solovetski Stone is placed *near* the former Dzerzhinsky monument and *in front of* KGB office). Etkind does not provide any strong evidence for this statement and in his book it seems to be just an assumption but by looking at the Last Address project and people's feelings about repressions which took place in their flats, at that particular place we can state that the proximity increases people's reflexivity of the memory of political repressions. Exactly in these aspects which are connected to emotional and proximal attachments to the person who is to be commemorated we can find the major advantage of this project in comparison to the official monuments and other historical policy tools.

4.4. All-pervading state

Despite the fact that the project communicates directly to citizens and seems to avoid the state at this stage the state still appears in the dialogues between volunteers and citizens. Another tactic of how to attract people to the memory of political repressions is to refer to the fact that the state somehow legitimized the project. In order to attract people's attention and raise their interest volunteers may say that they contacted with many state institutions while preparing this plaque or that they just came from there:

And in the beginning I say to them that we contacted FSS³⁰ during preoperational process. I can show archival documents from FSS, I have them with me. When I say FSS – it works perfectly, they understand now that I am not from somewhere, that I am somebody important (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

³⁰ Federal Security Service

During the discussion I mention a lot of different state organizations. It helps assuring people that we are approved (volunteer in Saint-Petersburg).

All volunteers and coordinators emphasized that the Kremlin protocol which legitimizes the project is useful tool in the dialogue with people. All of them keep this document and use it in different situations:

And we have this Kremlin protocol, which is very important document, We show it to people when they question our project (volunteer from Moscow)

It is evident from the experience of volunteers that even when the project tries to escape from the state control and communicate directly with citizens – without the state as a legitimizing factor the communication is more difficult.

4.5. Opening ceremonies and the community of the Last Address

I participated in three opening ceremonies (one in Saint Petersburg and two in Moscow). Usually it happens on weekends: coordinators of the project, volunteers, applicants, relatives and residents of the building come to the wall where the plaque should be installed. I noticed and it was later proved in interviews that almost all people know each other: they started talking and discussing something when they came to the spot. As I understood from interviews there is a community of the Last Address project which meet regularly at the opening ceremonies; and also people are actively use Facebook to communicate: they are friends and meet also outside of the project. The community contains mainly people who were applicants of the project before, coordinators, volunteers and interested spectators. I think that it is important to note again that the existence of this community shows the complex character of the Last Address project which is not about informational plaques but more about people and their emotions. It was not mentioned in the articles which I revised that another way of changing urban memorial landscape is the creation of the sustainable community which meets regularly for the common goal.

Usually coordinator starts the ceremony and gives a speech about the person, then passes the word to everybody who wants to say something. Based on the experience of participation and after watching videos from other opening ceremonies I definitely can prove the statement made by Cook and van Riemsdijk (2014) that these practices create emotional attachment through association with the repressed person. People gave speeches showing that they *feel family ties* (even if they are not relatives) or *symbolic connection* with the arrested person.

Professor Kiszgel is the great scholar! I have not been his student but I feel academic family sentiments with him, almost like academic grandson (speech on the opening ceremony, May 6, 2018)

Alexander Etkind (2013) shows that the energy of the event of memory³¹ is dependent on three main features: (1) originality – is it perceived as the different memory; (2) truthfulness – is it perceived as a real depiction of the past and (3) identity – is it associated with the deep level of identity. In accordance with the interviews and mainly according to watched videos from opening ceremonies (speeches) I can state that these features are very explicit in the opening ceremony of the Last Address project and if we can measure the energy of the event it should be high.

³¹ This is the main mechanism of functioning of memory – memory existent in events only, not by itself (Etkind, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The struggle against occupation—as well as resistance against the oppressive nature of domestic regimes—is to a large extent ‘the struggle of... memory against forced forgetting’. This is a struggle to survive as a witness, not only as an individual—‘to preserve the memory of social groups whose voice would otherwise have been silenced’ – Paul Connerton (1989).

In this thesis by looking at the Last Address memorial project I showed that discussions related to the relations of power and politics of memory in Russia are not reducible to the mere distinction between the dominant state and the oppressed people – these relations are much more interesting and complex.

Russian vertical power system provides certain extent of autonomy for the lower levels of power and there is no direct control and dominance. For example, the Last Address plaques in Taganrog showed us the possibility for the dialogue between the state and citizens (referendum) through the discussion of the status of these plaques and showed that an alternative memory has its place on the walls of this city. It is not an easy task for the project to establish this dialogue, but it is possible and in the thesis I showed possibilities and limitations of this process.

The politics of memory in Russia is not a homogenous field with the only one dominant state historical policy – there are relations between state actors with different agenda (Vladimir Putin, Ministry of Culture and Presidential Council) and non-state actors which can propose their values in consolidation with each other (Memorial and the Last Address) and with state actors as well (Presidential Council and Mikhail Fedotov).

Opportunities for the most influential changes which project brings I found in the chosen tactic of the Last Address project to communicate directly with citizens in the area which seems to be very far from the state policy. Project volunteers involve citizens into the dialogue about the topic, create emotional ties with the memory of victims, and connect people to the place which is also emotionally significant. Opening ceremony is another significant instrument; its energy

contributes to the changes in minds of participants (especially by association with the deep level of identity).

Yes, the memory of totalitarian past and victims of the state is very inconvenient process for Russian state in 2018. In the thesis I showed how exactly it is inconvenient and pointed out those spheres and ways where and how it can exist. Even in the most potential aspect of the work of the Last Address project – in direct communication with citizens – there is a state which the volunteers use in order to legitimate their work but at the same time in this practices the state appropriate the project because residents continue thinking that it is approved and even produced by the state.

I think that this project should work a lot of years to produce visible changes in the direction toward democracy in Russia in general, but times passes, project works and next Sunday, June 17, 2018 new plaque will be installed on the Sadovnicheskaya street, 27 in memory of an office worker Andrei Aleksandrovich Shugar, shot June 20, 1938 on charges of "participation in a counter-revolutionary terrorist organization and espionage". We know that the installation of this plaque involves emotions of residents of the building who will learn about this person from volunteers, emotions of participants of the unveiling ceremony who will listen or give speeches connecting themselves with the repressed person and experiences of all other people who will meet at this ceremony, discuss past and present, past and present repressions, past and present authorities. I think that Andrei Aleksandrovich Shugar with the help of the Last Address changes the politics of memory and the political regime in Russia, slowly, but in the right direction.

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