READING POLINA'S DIARY: NEW AVENUES IN CHECHEN WAR MEMORIALIZATION

By

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Abstract

This project is centered around Polina Zherebtsova's youth diary of the Second Chechen War. It investigates its value as a historical source in through an analysis of the text and of the publication process, in order to understand the civilian experience of war and its memorialization. Her account gives new perspectives on youth under wartime in the Chechen case. It revolved around morality collapsing because of hunger, generating lawlessness, civilian-led looting, ethnic persecution of Russian, sexual impurity in women. She observed a new "Chechenization" of the non-Chechen civilian population and increasingly "traditional" gender roles around. Girls in Chechnya followed more traditional paths in Polina's generation than in the previous, Sovietized ones, but Polina articulated a Soviet-style approach to her own life, which was centered around the war. The analysis of media reaction to the publication sheds light on the memorialization of the war in Russia, where it is widely considered as taboo, in Chechnya, and in the West.

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Part 1: Introduction

On November 2, 1999, a girl wrote in her diary: "In the spring, I will be fifteen years old… If I am still alive, obviously."[1] Her interrogations over death were well-placed. Two weeks before, she had been hit in the leg by shrapnel from the Russian bombing of the Grozny market, where she worked. The commitment to recording her life did not falter with her wound, nor by the dire material conditions of the siege. Polina Zherebtsova was born in Grozny in 1985 to a Russian mother and a Chechen father, who died when she was young. She began writing her diary at the age of nine and covered the two Chechen wars in her diary. Her accounts of the wars have been published with controversy in Russia and translated in other European languages, albeit not in English. In the academic literature, the Chechen Wars (1994-1996, 1999-contested) have mostly been studied through the analytical lenses of national secessionism, Islamic radicalization, widespread use of violence. There is a striking lack of scholarship on civilian narratives in Chechnya in wartime, which is why this project analyzes this diary and its publication.

1.1. Literature review: Making use of diaries

In the following section, I will be investigating the uses of diaries as historical sources. In order to understand the value of Polina's diary, this section will provide a framework to understand the relationship between the genre and its uses in history. It will review the theorizations and stakes of different subgenres: ego documents, diaries, crisis diaries, women's diaries, women's crisis diaries, and Soviet women's crisis. A discussion of the Second Chechen war literature will ensue, highlighting the frameworks of violence, ethnic and gender affiliations in the conflicts.

[1] Polina Zherebtsova, *Le journal de Polina Jerebtsova: Une Adolescence Tchétchène*, [Polina Zherebtsova's Diary, Chechen Adolescence] trans. Veronique Patte, Books, 2013, 42.

1.1.1. Diary as Genre

Post-World War II literary scholarship grappled with defining the boundaries of various genres of ego-document, and what these entailed in the construction of the self on a page. The first theorists, Lejeune and Okley, set forth the autobiography as a corpus that contains great variations in style and form, and yet had the common trait of investigating the self through writing.[2] Whether the autobiographer wrote a diary, a memoir, or loose letters, he or she was looking for answers about themselves, inscribing themselves into a tradition of writing on the self.[3] Scholars struggled to create a distinct definition for the *diary* genre, seeing it as a characteristically hybrid form because of the virtually unlimited variety of shapes it can take and topics it can cover — be it romantic life, domestic tasks, political events, intellectual debates. At times designated as strictly private, sometimes intended for an audience, the diary stands somewhere between private introspection and a public vision of history, on the edge of literature and history. In its most basic definition, the diary is bound together by the commitment to keeping a date log for each entry.[4]

The writing and the publication of the diary reflect the historical era in which it is situated. A diary from the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century does not fill the same function for its author, nor will it have the same function in the literature if published. In the eighteenth century, critics measured the value of a diary by its "justification of subjective narration", in the twentieth by the articulation of "modernist consciousness."[5] In order to get an idea of *the* diary of an era, one needs to focus on published materials.[6] Therefore, analyzing the

[2] Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia L. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily : Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 4.
[3] Bunkers, *Inscribing the Daily,* 4. .
[4] Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak (University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 6.
[5] Rebecca Steinitz, "Fiction and the Feminization of the Diary," in *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary*, ed. Rebecca Steinitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 7, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230339606_6.
[6] Steinitz, "Fiction and the Feminization of the Diary," 7.

sort of subjectivity that a *published* diary brings to the table will allow me to understand the way in which the genre of late twentieth-century war diaries is constructed.

1.1.2. Ego-Documents in history

The primary use of ego-documents is to get a glimpse into a historical actor's subjectivity. Letters, private notes, memoirs, diaries, and the like are usually texts constructed throughout a person's life, not always in a consistent fashion. They allow the scholar into some degree of introspection, without necessarily having the ambition to become a piece of literature. Instead, ego-documents leave room for the articulation, and therefore the construction of the self.[7]

Ego-documents provide an insight into subjectivity, but this cannot be their only value for historical research. Instead, the self in text is situated in history. Mary-Jo Maynes et al. convincingly theorized the connection of personal narratives with social contexts and history. For them, personal narratives push beyond the distinction between macro and micro level analysis and explore the relationships between them.[8] The self in the text has implications for historical research in posing the question of agency. Personal narratives go beyond the individual scale: they interact with other individual stories, as well as *public* narratives. These are the narratives one's family, workplace, religious institutions, government, etc.[9] They have their own distinct plots and situations and their own frames. With this in mind, the interconnections between individuals and social structures and narrative practice can lead to carving out individual agency in personal narratives.[10] Analyzing personal narratives demands historical contextualization from the scholar, because the writer is not necessarily aware of its embeddedness in wider narratives.

[7] Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 3.
[8] Mary-Jo Maynes, Barbara Laslett, and Jennifer L. Pierce, *Telling Stories : The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 3.
[9] Maynes et al., *Telling Stories*, 44.
[10] Maynes et al. *Telling Stories*, 44.

But the reverse phenomenon can also be of interest. According to Maynes et al., personal narratives can "illuminate the operation of historical forces and of public and historical narratives as they influence people's motivations and their self-understandings as historical agents."[11] The language and content reflecting on the self therefore sheds a light on the pervasiveness of social structures. Therefore, the personal narrative, in the form of a diary or other, informs the internalization of historical narratives, but it also has the potential to articulate one's place in a system of narratives, and to subvert it.

Consequently, personal narratives in general, and diaries in particular, are of interest to the scholar because they give a glimpse into the variety of individual self-understanding and into historical agency. While historians have used diaries of major political figures to illuminate their personal decisions, personal narratives from other members of society have the potential to make the voice of those who have historically been marginalized heard—and to see how their narratives interact with those of others, following or disproving them. For this reason, they are used in social history to provide counternarratives, and refute generalizations as products of a historical practice.[12]

1.1.3. Diary as a historical source

The defining feature of the diary is its commitment to the calendar. It is made of entries, each of with is a text written on a certain day in the first person.[13] Therefore, the genre generates a depiction of a situation that is informed by the values, mindset, and priorities of the author at the time of the recorded events. This sets it apart from other types of ego-documents, like memoirs, which form an intentional retrospective narrative. When written, the diary is not

[11] Maynes et al., *Telling Stories,* 44-45.
[12] Maynes et al,,*Telling Stories,* 1.
[13] Irina Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (2004): 562, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2004.00332.x.

informed by the subsequent views or narrative design of the author, although the publication process complicates this issue.[14]

For Lejeune, diary-writing is, first and foremost, a *practice* over a period of time, which produces a performance. This performance, because of the format of the diary, is informed not by a coherent and continuous narrative, but by discontinuous shifts in mindset.[15] To our interest, the mindset and its shifts in diary-writing are anchored in a historical setting. Therefore, diary-writing can be seen as a historical practice, which can infirm or utilize existing historical narratives, as discussed above. Moreover, the historical context evolves as the diarist adds entries, which gives the diary as a historical practice a potential to portray shifts in social perceptions, moral values, categorizations.

The characteristic immediacy of the diary led some thinkers to argue that the diary gives an unmediated access to the experience of the diarist. For the Lead Curator of the British Library Ekaterina Rogatchevskaia, the diary essentially gives a "snapshot of everyday life."[16] The memoirist, on the other hand, can "select images, scenes and events that fit best into his or her life," which leads to a manipulation of the past. However, this approach is not sufficiently critical, as many scholars of the diary refute the idea that the diary is immune to any mediation.

The idea of a performance speaks to a capital feature of diaries as historical sources: they do not provide unfiltered access to experience or to inner thoughts. Instead, the diarist always practices their diary in a way that is, to a certain extent, coherent to them and fits their goal at a given moment. Lejeune outlines four distinct functions to explain the practice of diary-writing, each hardly exclusive from the others. The functions are to express oneself (release the weight of emotions and thoughts), to reflect (analyze oneself and deliberate), to freeze time

[14] Gergely Kunt, "A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary and the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 2, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2647.
[15] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 182.
[16] Katya Rogatchevskaia, "Witnessing and Remembering Russia's War," The British Library (The British Library, 2014), https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/witnessing-and-remembering-russias-war.

(build memory out of paper, create archives from lived experience), and to take pleasure in writing.[17]

In a similar trend, Peri notes that diaries are *articulations* of experience, with the mediation of the writing process and self-censorship. Both unpublished and published manuscripts have sections that are crossed out by the author, and secrets are always kept from it.[18] This was famously the case of Anne Frank's diary, which was edited –and some say, censored-- first by her, and then by her father.[19] Self-reflexivity of the very act of writing is particularly present in some diaries, like we will see with Zherebtsova.[20]

Considering the performative quality of the diary, the question of the audience of the diary needs addressing. The intended reader of the diary can explicitly be stated, as a family member or a wide public, while other diaries are not meant to be read by anyone. The literary scholar Andrew Hassam has argued that the imaginary audience always existed in the diary, sometimes being the diarist themselves, in the future or in a better world.[21] However, I would like to emphasize the fluctuating quality of the imaginary audience, like most things in the diary. Therefore, a diarist referring to the posterity of their work does not signal a desire to publish. Conversely, some diarists published accounts they dared not show anyone, especially when the content is shameful.[22]

[17] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 194.
[18] Alexis Peri, *The War Within : Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 17.
[19] Sally Charnow, "Critical Thinking: Scholars Reread the Diary," in *Anne Frank Unbound : Media, Imagination, Memory.*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler, The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 292.
[20] Paperno, "What Can Be Done with Diaries?," 565.
[21] Andrew Hassam, "Reading Other People's Diaries" 56, no. 3 (2014): 435–42.
[22] See Anonyma, *A Woman in Berlin*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Picador, 2005). The author originally started her diary to show to her fiancé after he came back from the war. Upon reading her graphic account of sexual violence, he rejected her and the author decided to never show the diary to anyone. A few years later, an editor convinced her to publish it anonymously in the United States.

1.1.4. War diaries as crisis diaries

Traditionally, the form and the historical scholarship on it have been linked to eras of crisis – war, revolution, siege. For Alexis Peri, a historian of the siege of Leningrad, the genre of the diary has the quality of preserving the shifts in beliefs and narrative styles in times of crisis, echoing Nussbaum's claim that the diary intrinsically "creates and tolerates crisis in perpetuity."[23] Many historians and writers observed that the practice of diary-writing is widespread in times of crisis, the question remaining as to why.[24] In his characteristic approach, Lejeune centers around the practice of writing and treats the diary as a "by-product" of the practice. He connected the practice of diary writing and the eras of crises by arguing that discontinuity is "part and parcel of the diary's rhythm."[25]

In the face of hardship, some diarists turn to writing in order to "get out of the crisis," because the format of the diary allows them to process traumatic events as they unravel. [26] These crisis diaries differ from "all-purpose" diaries because they were written around a particular experience, with the intention of documenting and to process events through writing.[27] Diaries from times of crisis often aim to memorialize and to express, in Lejeune's typology.[28] For people undergoing a major change, the diary can procure a sense of intimacy for the writer who is in a situation of chaos.[29] Therefore, writing can be useful to channel the pressure of oppression when the writer is being persecuted or harassed.

Some like to draw a sharp distinction between diaries that are introspective, and those that are more closely situating the self in history (sometimes referring to the latter as

[23] Felicity A. Nussbaum, "Toward Conceptualizing a Diary," in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134 cited by Alexis Peri, *The War Within : Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 12.
[24] Amos Goldberg, *Trauma in First Person: Diary Writing during the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxz15p., 9-11. Lejeune, *On Diary*, 193.
[25] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 193.
[26] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 195.
[27] Lejeune, *On Diary*. 189.
[28] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 195.
[29] Goldberg, *Trauma in the First Person*, 9-11.

"memoirs"). The scholarship that makes use of crisis diaries confirms Lejeune's claim that this distinction is an over-simplification. Many writings tend to lean towards a middle ground. Holocaust scholar Amos Goldberg pointed out that Holocaust diaries often blurred the distinction. The events were the protagonist, while the focus shifted from the writer as the object to the writer as representative of the period.[30] Goldberg argued that while the modern diary was driven towards introspection, the Holocaust diary primarily stemmed from the urge to document the incidents and historical events.[31] Contrary to what the historical developments of the genre have tended towards, the question that the Holocaust diary answers is not "Who am I?" but rather "What have I seen?" and "What are the external forces that decide my fate and the fate of those around me?"[32] In another situation of diaries civilian under war, the Leningrad siege, writing was not necessarily a witnessing action but self-engaging one. Peri argued that the diary filled the role of maintaining some extent of sanity while the Soviet world seemed to collapse, in parallel with the bodies of the diarists.[33] Given the range of these uses, historians can look at crisis-diaries in order to understand where they situate themselves in history, in time, compared with other social categories, and with themselves. The crisis diary as a historical source entails a practice that engages with the crisis in its consequences and is often impacted by ruptures in historical events.

1.1.5. Women's and girl diaries

Teenage diaries provide a specific understanding of history, characterized by the first crystallization of the diarist's first ideas on the world, which are heavily influenced by external factors like family values or society.[34] The historians of adolescent diaries Sally Charnow and Gergely Kunt observed that teenage diarists typically record their first romantic experiences, as

[30] Goldberg, *Trauma in the First Person,* 13.
[31] Goldberg, *Trauma in the First Person* 13-14.
[32] Goldberg, *Trauma in the First Person*. 14
[33] Peri, *The War Within*, 4.
[34] Kunt, "A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary", 2.

well as the outside world and its historical contingencies in the same space.[35] They often form their nascent ideas in opposition with societal or parental expectations, and are informed by first independent experiences.

Beyond the construction of the private self, youth diaries can become spaces for self-actualization of the professional self.[36] Anne Frank's ambition and quality as a writer was highlighted in the *Critical Edition* of her diary, which featured an original text, her edit of it, and Otto Frank's round of editing.[37] In Kunt's studies, Hungarian children made a point of chronicling the Hungarian revolution in a "professional" manner.[38] This ties to the analysis of diary as a performative way of self-expression, where the diarist, at least in part, shapes their production to fit their idea of professional standards.

Diaries have been associated with young women since the beginning of the nineteenth century, when fancy diaries became popular gifts for girls. The large number of girl diaries did not go unnoticed by either Lejeune or feminist scholars like Bunkers, and these sources opened the field for studies of women's diaries, especially as diaries were "squarely" placed within a tradition of women's writings and textual production.[39] This scholarship centered on women's diaries strived to unearth the kinds of narratives women have told, and the ways in which these narratives inscribe the self.[40]

The association of the genre with femininity is not unproblematic. In the French tradition, adolescent girls could keep a diary for themselves, whereas marketing one's writings was unfit for a woman to do. Its private character allowed diary-writing to be considered a harmless occupation. In Europe and in North America, women were encouraged to keep a diary

[35] Sally Charnow,"Critical thinking: scholars reread the diary" in *Anne Frank unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory* (eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler, Indiana University Press: 2012), 291; Gergely Kunt, "The Collaborative Illustrated Diaries of Two Preadolescent Boys During the 1956 Revolution.," *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 9, no. 0 (October 11, 2016): 102.
[36] Charnow, "Critical Thinking," 294.
[37] Charnow, "Critical Thinking," 308.
[38] Kunt, "The Collaborative Illustrated Diaries," 102.
[39] Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, 3.
[40] Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily,* 3.

only before marrying. The wife was not supposed to dedicate time to her own private thoughts and was not supposed to keep any secret from her husband.[41]

Just because holding a diary was a proper activity for a girl did not mean that the diary could not or cannot be subversive. The association of the diary with girlhood dates back to the nineteenth century trend of fictionalized diaries. The publication of gender-compliant diaries and fictionalized accounts around diaries crystallized the diary as the quintessential feminine genre, whereas actual manuscript diaries often undermined conventional gender expectations.[42] This entails that the kind of gender roles promoted in a published diary should be paid careful attention to.

1.1.6. Women's wartime diaries

Women's wartime diaries are some of the most widespread sources in historical works on gender. Edited volumes on women's experience of the American Civil War or the World Wars primarily use diaries as sources and bring to light women's activities and thinking throughout the wars.[43] Diaries have been used to shed light on a plethora of topics, such as women's participation in pacifist demonstrations, the impact of blockades on children, the psychological toll of personal loss, the rhetorical shifts in women's conceptions...

Crucially, women's diaries in times of crisis shed light on the profound shifts in gender roles that characterize wartime, both in the scholarship and in public memory. Wars, and periods of sustained crises, are known to shake societal values, among which understandings of gender. In part, these shifts stem from women taking up new jobs or activities in society because of the special needs of times of crisis, having the obligation or the freedom to take up

41 Valerie Raoul, "Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 22, no. 3 (1989): 58–59.
42 Steinitz, "Fiction and the Feminization of the Diary," 155.
43 Bruna Bianchi and Geraldine Ludbrook, *Living War, Thinking Peace (1914-1924) : Women's Experiences, Feminist Thought, and International Relations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

traditional men's roles.[44] In addition, situations of famine and violence, characteristic of wars and crises, put a strain on the traditional gender roles of a given society.[45]

The narration of gender-specific war issues such as gendered violence or mass rape can induce a new framework for women's place in society. A paramount example of this was the diary of *A Woman in Berlin* by Anonyma. The publication of this first-person account scandalized the 1950s audience with its matter-of-fact tone in describing the widespread rape of German women by the Red Army, as well as the sexual relationships women cultivated in order to maintain access to food and some level of physical safety.[46]

1.1.7. Soviet diaries

The diary has had a privileged place as a source in Soviet history. The works by Jochen Hellbeck and others pioneered the idea that autobiographical accounts functioned as "laboratories of the self" whereby the historian could access the individual's internalization of Soviet values in the aftermath of the revolutionary period.[47] The vast scholarship drawn from Soviet diaries stems from the fact that Soviet authorities compiled existing diaries and put them into archives, where they are now accessible. Sometimes, like in the case of the Siege of Leningrad, diary-writing was explicitly encouraged by the local Soviet leadership.[48] Hellbeck's approach, known as part of the subjectivity school, has been criticized for over-emphasizing the interiorization of Bolshevik ideology to the expense of more material considerations.[49] Critics of Hellbeck argued that the construction of the self, which transpired from the diaries,

[44] Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women : Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013): 1-5
[45] Peri, *The War Within,* 41-46.
[46] Miriam Gebhardt, *Crimes Unspoken : The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War*, trans. Nick Somers (Polity, 2017): Chapter 5, "The Long Shadow", Section "Anonymous and the Censorship of Memory" Because of the Ebook format, there are no reliable page numbers. All subsequent citations are from the same section, unless indicated otherwise.
[47] Peri, *The War Within,* 11; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
[48] Peri, *The War Within*, 13-14.
[49] Victor Petrov and Riley Quinn, *An Analysis of Sheila Fitzpatrick's Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (CRC Press, 2017).

did not account for the everyday strategies that Soviets used to gain access to food, goods, jobs, social status. While the self on paper could frame the morals of the writer in party rhetoric, survival and opportunities depended on co-optation of the language, which nuanced the idea of complete commitment to Bolshevism, as had been demonstrated by Sheila Fitzpatrick.[50]

Wartime diaries, from the Red Army frontline or from the Leningrad Siege, also helped in understanding how Soviet individuals interacted with the party ideology, and how their belief in the system shifted in the face of war. Whereas the war had been announced as the single most important event in the life for the USSR and its citizens, the extreme hardships that soldiers and civilians faced —mass destruction, mass death, siege, famine— tested the belief of Soviet diarists in the state and in the moral fortitude of Bolshevism. [51]

Diary-and memoir-writing were markedly widespread activities in the Soviet Union, and their publication became common from the 1980s onwards. According to Soviet historian Irina Paperno, Soviet diaries typically embedded personal stories into their historical context. Personal stories historicized the recent past as well as the older one and more often than not, the Great Patriotic War took a major place in personal narratives.[52] Starting in the 1980s, a public spokesperson of the *perestroika* urged her compatriots to create "unofficial, private sources for the future investigation of our time."[53] The heavy encouragement to create personal narratives as testimonies that will be tried in the "tribunal" of history therefore permeated the lives of writers across the country.[54]

[50] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
[51] Oleg Budniskii used Red Army officer's diaries to show that ideologically committed and educated Soviet officers had come to perceive limits to the Soviet system upon seeing the horrors of the "liberation" of Eastern and Central Europe in 1945. See Oleg Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy: Educated Soviet Officers in Defeated Germany, 1945," *Kritika* 10, 3 (2009): 629-682.
Peri also showed how the Leningrad siege and its feeling of abandonment from the state created a disillusionment with Soviet morality. Peri, *The War Within,* 10.
[52] Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience : Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), xi – xiii.
[53] Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience*, 42.
[54] Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience*, 42.

1.2. Chechen wars scholarship

1.2.1. General scholarship

Although calls to write diaries proliferated in the late 1980s, the scholarship of the Chechen wars does not make significant use of them. Civilian voices are largely missing from the scholarship on the wars. The bulk of the scholarship on the Chechen wars uses the scale of military developments, politics, and the geopolitical implications of the conflict. Political scientists and international relations scholars investigated the evolution of relations between Moscow and Grozny. [55] The scholarship concerned with political and military decision-making focused on the differences in Russian strategy between the two wars, particularly the Chechenization of the second conflict.[56] The Chechenization policy consisted in the recruitment of ethnic Chechens in pro-Russian paramilitary forces, which gradually replaced Russian troops in the Second War and in the maintaining of "peace" in Chechnya. This phenomenon, which is sometimes said to have assured the durability of the Russian rule of Chechnya since 2000, was notably analyzed in an ethnography, which showed how this strategy succeeded in eradicating secessionist insurgency.[57] The increasingly extremist stance of Islamist leadership in Chechnya towards the second war represents a large area of focus in the scholarship, as well as its role on the Western acceptation of the Russian frame of an "International War on Terror" explained .[58]

Early on, journalists and human rights organizations raised the public's awareness on the incredibly violent living conditions of both troops, combatants, and civilians undergoing

[55] Dmitri V. Trenin, Aleksei V. Malashenko, and Anatol Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Washington (DC): Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).
[56] Quentin Hodgson, "Is the Russian Bear Learning? An Operational and Tactical Analysis of the Second Chechen War, 1999-2002," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26 ii (January 1, 2003): 64–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390412331302985; Richard Sakwa, "The Revenge of the Caucasus: Chechenization and the Dual State in Russia," *Nationalities Papers* 38 v (January 1, 2010): 601–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2010.498468.
[57] Emil Souleimanov, "An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency: *Kadyrovtsy* and Russia's Policy of Chechenization," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 2 (March 4, 2015): 91–114, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2014.900976.
[58] James Hughes, *Chechnya : From Nationalism to Jihad*, [National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century] (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); John Russell, *Chechnya : Russia's "War on Terror"* (Routledge, n.d.).

war in Chechnya.[59] Violence was facilitated by the Russian discourse, vilifying of all Chechens as one of the structural explanations for violence, the intrinsic violence in the Russian army, the colonial domination and asymmetry of the conflict, and the general impunity of the actors.[60] Whereas these accounted for Russian racialized approach against the Chechens, they do not explain the ethnic situation among civilians. The story of individual lives in the Chechen wars also interested scholars, who focused mostly on understanding the origins of and participation in insurgent movements and terrorism.[61]

The scholars who investigated the civilian experience of the war focused mostly on the experience of violence, which permeated most spheres of society. They shone a light on the diversity of experience violence against civilians, using personal accounts and human rights reports. Following the massive bombing of Grozny in February 2000, "Cleaning operations" [*zachistki]* took place on a mass scale throughout the devastated city, in which civilians were randomly killed or kidnapped and tortured.[62] Sexual violence against men and women was also widespread.[63]

Several autobiographical accounts of the war were published, all of them recounting the events after the facts, except for Zherebtsova's.[64] Because of their retrospective perspective,

[59] Anne Nivat, *Chienne de guerre : Une femme reporter en Tchétchénie* (Fayard, 2000); Anna Politkovskaya and John Crowfoot, *A Dirty War : A Russian Reporter in Chechnya* (Harvill, 2010).
[60] Julie Wilhelmsen, *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable* (Taylor & Francis, 2016); Anne Le Huérou and Amandine Regamey, "Russia's War in Chechnya: The Discourse of Counterterrorism and the Legitimation of Violence," in *Democracies at War against Terrorism*, ed. Samy Cohen, 2008, 211–32.
[61] Brian Glyn Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya: The Russian-Chechen Wars, the Al Qaeda Myth, and the Boston Marathon Bombings* (University Press of New England, 2015); Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov, *Chechnya : Life in a War-Torn Society*, California Series in Public Anthropology: V. 6 (University of California Press, 2004).
[62] Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in Wa*r. (Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2010); Anne Le Huerou, in *Chechnya at War and Beyond* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317756170; Laurence Binet, *War Crimes and Politics of Terror in Chechnya 1994-2004* (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).
[63] Amandine Regamey, "The Weight of Imagination: Rapes and the Legend of Women Snipers in Chechnya," in *Rape in Wartime*, ed. Raphaëlle Branche and Fabrice Virgili, Genders and Sexualities in History (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 128–39, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283399_10.
[64] Milana Terloeva, *Danser sur les Ruines- Une Jeunesse Tchétchène* [Dancing on Ruins: A Chechen adolescence](Hachette, 2006); Khassam Baiev, Nicolas Daniloff, and Ruth Daniloff, *The Oath: A Surgeon Under Fire* (New York: Walker Books, 2004).

they do not focus on everyday life but rather give their account of how the war unfolded. These memoirs give enriching testimonies to the events, but because of their form they are unable to portray temporal shifts in the same way as a diary. The articulations of mindset, gender and nationality are therefore not subject to the fluctuation that the diary allows.

1.2.2. Women in Chechnya

A gendered analysis of an armed conflict makes sense of experiences that are constructed by shifting ideals about gender, and realities of gender roles. There was interest into the gendered aspect of the war from early on but here again, all the literature is based on the experience of ethnic Chechen women, and does not go across ethnic lines in the gendered issue.

Roughly, in the Chechen conflict, like it is generally the case in wartime, masculinity grew increasingly militarized, and femininity more domesticated.[65] However, these categories are too simplistic, with a myriad of actors enacting different versions of traditional Chechen, Soviet, Russian, roles. The womanly experience of the war was examined with research into sexual violence as well as women engaged in fighting and terrorism.[66] Fieldwork on morality conducted in Chechnya by the anthropologist Ieva Raubisko's stands out in examining mechanisms of everyday life *in situ*. She argued that the war fostered a discourse of "moral disintegration," especially among Chechen women. This came from a strong perceptions that traditions and frameworks to make sense of the world had been lost in wartime.[67]

[65] Alice Szczepanikova, "Chechen Refugees in Europe: How Three Generations of Women Settle in Exile," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou et al. (Routledge, 2014), 19–36; Alice Szczepanikova, "Chechen Women in War and Exile: Changing Gender Roles in the Context of Violence," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 5 (September 3, 2015): 753–70, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.999315.

[66] Régamey, "The Weight of Imagination." Paul J. Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis (MD): Naval Institute, 2010).

[67] Ieva Raubisko, "'A Lot of Blood Is Unrevenged Here': Moral Disintegration in Post-War Chechnya," in *Multiple Moralities and Religions in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Jarrett Zigon (New York, NY, UNITED STATES: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2011), 110, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/centraleurope-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1337710.

Because Chechnya was hardly accessible both during and after the war, scholarship on everyday experiences relies on interviews in asylum countries. Szczepanikova used oral history interviews in Austria, Germany and Poland in order to get a sense of Chechen women's experience of the "continuum of violence" starting in 1994.[68] She focused on the impact of military violence on the family and self-perceptions of several generations of women in the war through the years of exile. Her work stands out in investigating ordinary conditions in wartime, beyond interactions with soldiers and fighters. It articulates the shifts in responsibilities taken on by women. As civilian men became most vulnerable to kidnappings and arbitrary arrests, women became breadwinners as well traditional caregivers. This took a toll on their health and values but gave them a sense of empowered capabilities.

On the other hand, the younger generation of women were particularly vulnerable to sexual and domestic abuse under wartime. The present Chechen leadership strongly enforces neo-traditional gender roles where the oppression of women that took shape during the war was only reinforced in peacetime. Szczepanikova worked on the generational differentiation between women who were raised in the Soviet system (1950s to mid-60s) and the "perestroika" generation (born in the late 60s to the early 1980s). She only briefly takes into account Chechen women from Zherebtsova's generation, who grew up in the "continuum of violence," and who constructed their conceptions of the world and gender roles in wartime.[69] They generally broke away from the previous generations by embracing a more pronounced expression of religiosity and a traditionalist understanding of family.[70] Szczepanikova opened the way in thinking about the young generation of Chechen women, but her research does not cover the thinking of this generation extensively: she does not mention how these women perceived the war's impact on

[68] "Continuum of violence" is a term coined by Cockburn to characterize women's experience of war. Women generally experience violence beyond the temporal frames ascribed to armed conflicts based on times of battles. See Cynthia Cockburn, "War and Security, Women and Gender: An Overview of the Issues," *Gender & Development* 21, no. 3 (November 1, 2013): 433–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2013.846632.
[69] Szczepanikova, 764–66.
[70] Szczepanikova, "Chechen Women in War and Exile," 764-66.

their life. It also does not give a glimpse into their vision of interethnic relations, or roles outside of the homogenous Chechen family.

1.3. Research questions

Given the aforementioned literature on the Chechen wars, Polina Zherebtsova's account deserves attention for its unusual position. Not only is it a diary from the war era, but it also articulated gender and ethnicity in a particular manner due to her ethnic background. She was widely perceived as a Russian girl because she had her mother's Russian last name. Her father was a Chechen man she never knew, and most of her friends were Chechen. As a young girl, she testified to a period of social change that is now known for being highly repressive in gender and ethnic expression.

My project will therefore concentrate on the following questions:

- What can a published diary tell us about the civilian experience of war overtime? How can it function as a historical source?
- Does the performance of Zherebtsova in her diary challenge the established narratives of the Chechen war? How did Russian and Chechen understandings of gender roles shift during the war?
- How has its publishing history influenced its position as a historical source? Why was it a problem to publish in Russia? How and why did public reactions differ in other spaces?

1.4.Theoretical framework

In their cross-disciplinary volume on the value of diaries, Wess and Langford distinguished four approaches to the genre: “diary as a form of subjectivity, as a practice in everyday life, as a historical document and as a fictional form.”[71] This analysis will use the frameworks of the diary as a practice in everyday life and as a historical document.

[71] Rachael Langford and Russell West, *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Amsterdam - Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1999), 70.

It should be noted that these approaches are not hermetically separate from each other, nor should they. Whereas a literary scholar will probably take a closer look at the fictional form and the subjectivity than the historian, a study of one diary cannot completely obscure the fact that the diary is also historically anchored and a practice. This will be a capital point in the following analysis: diary-writing is a historical practice, and the text as its product allows to make sense of historical frameworks, understandings, and subjectivities. Following Lejeune, I will analyze Zherebtsova's diary not merely as a text but also as practice. This entails focusing not only on the content of the diary, but on the question of where and how the diarist wrote, who read it, which diaries were published, how the published diaries were edited and produced, who read them.[72] This will help understand social relationships between a Russian girl and the outside world: whom the diary was shown to and used for both during and after the war.

For Lejeune, the *crisis* diary is "in search of its own ending," anticipating a way to "get out of the diary and as a consequence, out of the diary itself."[73] In the case of Zherebtsova's account, the text finds its end with her imminent move to Stavropol as a refugee in its French published version. While the text in its published form ends on December 29, 2002, the *practice* of diary-writing carried on further. Other publications span different stretches of time, which means the published diaries have different endings. Because of the continuous practice of diary writing, the analytical category of the crisis diary as Lejeune saw it is under investigation here. While it should be looking forward to its ending, this is not completely fitting in Zherebtsova's case. At the same time, just because the diary did not start or end as a crisis diary, does not necessarily mean it could not represent a shift in frameworks, a disparate piece of literature, in the same way that a crisis diary will. Therefore, this analysis will not only investigate the impact of the Chechen war on civilian life, but also question Lejeune's concept of the "crisis" diary.

[72] Steinitz, “Fiction and the Feminization of the Diary,” 5.
[73] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 195.

Sederberg has argued that the diary presents a possibility to think about the meaning of the present moment as the subjects had the feeling of "living through history."[74] This sense of living through extraordinary times generate shifts in temporal frameworks, as the "horizons of past, present, and future change."[75] While the idea of historical significance plays a capital role in Zherebtsova's narrative, I will expand the scope to look at her articulation of several frameworks, added to temporality.

Gender, ethnicity, and agency will be the primary categories of analysis in the thesis. The need for a gendered approach to Zherebtsova does not stem from the mere fact that she is a girl, and therefore prone to gender-specific violence. Instead, the goal will be to investigate Zherebtsova's approach to what women and men ought to be doing, regarding themselves, each other, their ethnic compatriots, society, war. The shifts in Zherebtsova's positions are hardly surprising. Commonly, articulations of ideas regarding social issues, and gender roles in particular are formulated in adolescence. This coincides with first romantic experiences as well as teenage inquisitive and contrarian tendencies.[76]

The Chechen history of resistance against many forms of Russian or Soviet assimilation, in deportation and in their homeland, fit Anthony Smith's framework of long-term "ethnic survival," in modernizing and in neo-traditionalist contexts.[77] This study will be interested in how Zherebtsova interacts with the myths and performances of ethnicity around her, and how she constructs her own identity with regards to others.

Agency as a category of analysis means analyzing the narrative's challenges of the pre-existing frameworks.[78] Whereas most gender literature has taken a de facto Eurocentric stance,

[74] Kathryn Sederberg, "Writing through Crisis: Time, History, Futurity in German Diaries of the Second World War" 40, no. 2 (2017): 323, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2017.0019.
[75] Sederberg, 323. .
[76] Gergely Kunt, "The Collaborative Illustrated Diaries of Two Preadolescent Boys During the 1956 Revolution.," *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 9, no. 0 (October 11, 2016): 107, https://doi.org/10.5195/ahea.2016.252.
[77] Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 125-147.
[78] Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Gender, and Embodiment," in *Politics of Piety*, REV-Revised, The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (Princeton University Press, 2005), 153–88, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvct00cf.11.

Sara Mahmood challenged the existing structures by not equating women's liberation with liberal standards Western European. The women who are rejecting Eurocentrism and embracing traditional gender roles in line with societies that are commonly seen as "matriarchal" showed agency in conscious challenge of the feminist framework. These categories of gender, ethnicity, and agency are intrinsically intertwined. This will especially useful in looking at the construction of Zherebtsova's morals on femininity throughout the diary. Her dual-ethnic identity grapples with post-Soviet values, as well as a romantic idealization of Chechen identity, and on the other hand the shifting enforcement of neo-traditionalist Chechen and Russian standards.

Part 2. Analysis of Polina's diary

2.1. Crisis diary, Reflexivity, Material takes

As we saw in the previous chapter, a diary can work a critical source in understanding the more or less sudden transformations that operate in wartime through narratives and through self-construction. After giving general context on the Second Chechen War, which worked as the backdrop and the topic of Polina Zherebtsova's diary, the analysis of Polina's diary will put into light her assessment of the moral challenges caused by material strain.[79]

2.1.1. General context of the diary

Chechnya had unilaterally declared independence in November 1991 and remained de facto independent until Moscow's intervention in 1994. In that period already, many of Grozny's Russian population left the Republic. The mass-scale shelling and bombing in 1994 and 1996 led to the death and exile of tens of thousands of the capital's inhabitants, especially non-Chechens, among which was a majority of ethnic Russians.[80] Polina and her mother were one of the non-Chechens who stayed. Chechen fighters retook Grozny in August 1996 and signed a cease-fire and the subsequent Khasavyurt Accords with Russia, which set the way for Russian and international recognition of independence. In January 1997, the only democratic elections in the history of the Republic put Aslan Maskhadov in charge of the country and of the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Chechen Republic.[81] Incursions into the neighboring Dagestan by the infamous warlords Shamil Basaev and Khattab precipitated a second Russian intervention in August 1999, which is covered by Polina's diary. This time, it was framed as a

[79] When speaking of Zheretbsova as the child writing the diary, I will use "Polina" whereas in adulthood she will be referred to as "Zherebtsova."
[80] Hughes, *From Nationalism to Jihad*, 82.
[81] Maskhadov had previously negotiated to not have any pro-Russian candidate in the election. The elections were monitered and international monitors who declared them "democratic and free." Maskhadov polled 60% of the vote. Hughes, *From Nationalism to Jihad*, 92.

"fight against terrorism" and never recognized by Russian authorities as a war.[82] The Russian army began air raids in Chechnya in August 1999 and pronounced the they had successfully retook of Grozny successful in March 2000, although fighting continued. The second war was marked by "dual radicalization" of protagonists, according to Hughes. Vladimir Putin, first as Prime Minister then as President ordered the use of military force that was qualified by the expert as "disproportionate and excessive," yet critical to his electoral victory in the anticipated elections of March 2000.[83] Since the proclamation of independence in 1991, multiple factions in the Chechen leadership moved from secular nationalism towards an "idiom of jihad."[84] More or less pronounced, the idea of a Chechen Holy War against Russia and the need for the instigation of Sharia Law and religious piety had taken root in the years leading up to and further continued throughout the Second war. Various religious leaders –Wahhabis like Basaev, or Akhmad Kadyrov as mufti of the Chechnya, had gained a critical amount of power and support in a highly factionalized Chechen side. Polina's diary takes place in this hectic context in Grozny. Her diary (1999-2002) spans the bulk of the second war while the most intense period of bombing and armed conflict in the city center were undergoing. [85]

Polina Zherebtsova was born in 1985 in Grozny. It is generally understood that her mother came from an ethnic Russian background and her father from a Chechen family. She nevertheless insists on having a mixed and multicultural ancestry that included Don Cossacks,

[82] Le Huérou et al, *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, Introduction. Due to only accessing the e-book, I do not have page numbers for this volume, which is extensively cited below.
[83] Yeltsin had unexpectedly resigned from his presidential office on December 31, 1999. This resulted in the appointment of Vladimir Putin as Acting President, and anticipated elections in March 2000. Putin had held the position of Prime minister since August 1999. Because of his heavy involvement in the process, some call the Second Chechen War "Putin's war." See Sergei Kovalev, "Putin's War," *New York Review of Books*, February 10, 2000, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/02/10/putins-war/ and Hugues, *From Nationalism to Jihad*, xiii.
[84] Hughes, *From Nationalism to Jihad*, xiii.
[85] The periodization of the Second Chechen War is a controversial topic in the literature. The heavy period of shelling, bombing ended in March 2000 with the "fall of Grozny" but repeated "cleansing occupations" carried on years later. Another cutoff date could be March 2003, when Chechnya was officially re-integrated into the Russian Federation, 2005 when Maskhadov was assassinated, 2009 when the "anti-terrorist operation" officially ended. In any case, the diary covers the periods of heavy fighting, the fall of Grozny, and the entry of pro-Russian Chechen troops in Chechnya as well as cleansing operations. See Le Huérou, *Russia at War and Beyond*, Introduction "Chechnya and Russia: reassessing the chronology."

Armenians, Polish Jews, Chechens, Tatars, Georgians, Ukrainians, French, Spanish, Poles.[86] Polina's father left when her mother was still pregnant and died when Polina was very young. She never knew him. She carries her mother's Russian last name, and uses Russian as her mother tongue, which led neighbors in Chechnya to categorize her as ethnic Russian. Their extended family lived in other parts of Russia, which meant that the two women had no relatives in Grozny.[87]

Polina started recording her life in a diary in 1994 at the age of nine and stopped in 2014.[88] She first published her diary spanning September 1999 through December 2002 in Moscow in 2011.[89] This analysis used the French translation of her published diary, which amounts to more than 540 pages.[90]

By definition, the diary pieces together thoughts that are not linear and not necessarily in a coherent manner. One topic, or person, can be dwelled on for a while and not feature ever again, without an explanation.[91] Polina wrote more or less consistently, detailing what she deemed significant nearly every day. Although the entries do not follow a rigid structure, some topics are recurrent: how she procured food or money to survive, her interactions with people (her mother, friends, neighbors, strangers), her feelings about the war or the topics close to her heart. She wrote about the events of the day that she deems the most significant, either to her personal life or to history. In this vein, we can say that the diary follows Lejeune's structure of writing to communicate one's feelings, and to record history.[92] She dwelled on theoretical considerations surrounding the state of Chechnya, love, history and her place in it, as we will see in the subsequent analysis.

[86] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 378,
[87] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 262.
[88] Ostap Karmodi, "Sistema Unizheniya [Sytem of Humilitation]," *Radio Svoboda*, October 10, 2017, https://www.svoboda.org/a/28777974.html.
[89] Polina Zherebtsova, *Dnevnik Zherebtsovoi Poliny [The Diary of Polina Zherebtsova]* (Moscow: Detektiv-Press, 2011).
[90] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*.
[91] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 182.
[92] Lejeune, *On Diary*, 194-195.

Her diary made extraordinary conditions like intense bombings and gruesome killings cohabitate with mundane matters --neighborly disputes over water, pets, and love squabbles. The scenes of daily life form an image of shifting values in wartime Chechnya, as her theoretical reflections on women, soldiers, people from different ethnicities are mixed with her account of their behavior. Thanks to these explicit and implicit accounts of her thoughts about Chechens, Russians, Muslims, other women, men, as well as herself, Zherebstosva's diary provides us with new narratives about the second Chechen conflict and the unravelling of identities under it.

2.1.2. From bodily to moral decay

In the following section, I will focus on the material conditions in her writing, which I argue point to Polina's narrative of her life being engulfed by the war, where considerations of survival prevent her from focusing on her professional and personal aspirations. The urgency of material needs will make for a *crisis* diary. This section will also highlight the specific survival strategies that she used to provide for basic material needs. The material hardships formulate a sense of morality that speaks to her self-construction as a teenager.

Polina usually worked on the market, where she was wounded by shrapnel in the bombing of the Grozny central market in October 1999. This marked the beginning of her long troubles accessing money and food.[93] In the first few months in the diary (Fall 1999) she and her mother were brought food by young Chechen men. Polina fell in love with one of them.[94] This speaks to some amount of material solidarity, as well as personal, sometimes intimate relationships between people from different ethnic backgrounds in the Chechen Republic in wartime, at least in late 1999. Once they had spent all their savings on food, and Polina realized that she misjudged the severity and durability of the war.[95] As she realized that her survival was

[93] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,* 25–29.
[94] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* 76.
[95] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,* 157.

the only concern at hand, the diary became a "crisis diary" in Lejeune's sense. She wrote not only to communicate, but also to help herself in surviving the crisis.[96]

Polina's survival was threatened by lack of food, and armed combat in the city. Outside the apartment, and at times inside, snipers and bombings made finding food or water a potentially deadly enterprise. Adding to the dangers associated with armed conflicts, civilians went on rampages in apartments in order to resell their plunder. They represented a potential threat of sexual or physical violence for Polina, who was at times unable to walk and stuck in an apartment that barely had a door.[97] Although Human Rights Reports shed light on the looting and abuse perpetrated by Russian soldiers, Polina's is the most extensive testimony to widespread civilian looting.[98]

As part of the construction of the self, adolescent diaries often interrogate the moral context of the historical situation and seek to clearly define the author's morality.[99] Here, the conditions of dire hunger —both observed in other people and in Polina's case—progressively led her to a vision of moral collapse and to the impossibility of a personal future.

The collapse of morality in Chechen society was the central thesis of anthropologist Ieva Raubisko in her ethnography of postwar Chechnya. In Raubisko's analysis, human dignity is a cardinal Chechen virtue, and it informs justice, which is the most important Chechen value. Ultimately, in the "Chechen worldview," dignity can be restored by blood feuds.[100] The moral judgement of wartime behavior is central to Polina in her treatment of material considerations, ethnic behavior and gender roles, in a logic similar to the one exhibited in Raubisko's analysis, although its "blood feud" element is crucially absent.

96 Lejeune, *On Diary*, 193–95.
97 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 116.
98 Regamey in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, "Even little girls here have diamonds": looting, symbolic appropriation, and violence"
99 Kunt, "The Collaborative Illustrated Diaries," 102; Charnow, "Critical Thinking: Scholars Reread the Diary," 299.
100 Ieva Raubisko, "'A Lot of Blood Is Unrevenged Here': Moral Disintegration in Post-War Chechnya," in *Multiple Moralities and Religions in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Jarrett Zigon (New York, NY, UNITED STATES: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2011), 99-100.

Polina's judgement of how the war changed the Chechen Republic appeared in her treatment of looting in abandoned apartments. At first, Polina expressed disgust and pity for the people who would maraud in abandoned apartments in order to scrape some food and objects to resell. On December 18, 1999, she wrote about a thirty-people group who settled in her apartment building: "Externally, these people look like homeless people. I know they are not responsible for it. They are unhappy. They do not have a roof. But I fail to hide my disgust. We were all made dirty and hungry, we were taught how to steal. How repulsive! The men in this 'squadron' rampage through foreign courtyards like a locust swarm."[101] Her strong moral repulsion against looting balanced out with her pity for the group and the fact that they were not fully responsible for their debasing actions —the war was. As a breaking point in people's lives, it turned all people into thieves, and drew a comparison with nuisance. For Polina, the moral order of the Republic has therefore been upset by war as it destroyed material goods and forced people to resort to looting.

Polina's personal material situation changed with a "cleansing operation," which effectively forced her to address moral issues. In November 1999, Russian soldiers violently stormed her building and forced all inhabitants to immediately leave the premises without their belongings, as part of a "cleansing" operation (*zachiskta*).[102] "Cleansing" operations referred to Russian troops entering civilian spaces and tracking down whoever was considered a terrorist. Often, these operations resulted in kidnappings or summary executions of Chechen men and civilians at large.[103] After being evicted from their apartment and losing all their resources, Polina and her mother had no choice but to go on “expeditions,” scavenging through what was left from neighboring houses to obtain food and basic supplies for shelter in a bombed building. In the diary, she engaged with the morality of her looting. Her mother set a rule of not going

[101] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,* 100.
[102] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,* 119-125.
[103] Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya,* 50–54.

through the “living spaces” but only kitchens and bathrooms to obtain food and medication. She wrote: “Taking food is not a sin. We never held it against them when people took our food…”[104] The confrontation of Polina with hunger therefore made her set a clear boundary in her own morality: going on "expeditions" was only justifiable for survival. Stepping beyond these limits—going into living spaces, looting in order to make money— was undignified.

With malnutrition came changes in Polina's perception of her own body, which drastically impacted her self-construction. On New Year's Eve, 2000, Polina wrote that all her teeth were already shaky and some of them black, which made her look older.[105] Helplessly witnessing the physical decay of one's body was a central theme among diarists of the Leningrad siege. Although the scale of the Chechen situation was not comparable with the starvation that took place in the blockade, physical transformation progressively made Polina feel like her youth had been taken away. In addition to hunger, Polina faced repeated infections and complications because of her leg wound. Like in Leningrad, she addressed her physical degradation by constructing a new self in the diary, as someone whose life had been destroyed by the war.[106] The body being subject to change contributed to the vilification of the war as the great transformative experience in Polina's life.

The moral indignity and bodily changes signified that the war had destroyed Polina's youth and future. She articulated these thoughts several times over, thinking that she would never be able live a happy life and have a relationship because of her physical and mental state. She wrote: "I hate those who made the world around me so desolate. I hate them because of my broken youth! The diseases I've gotten! The inability to forget! To carry on with my life in normal conditions! To study full-time! To develop! To be useful! To love! To be loved!"[107] The

[104] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* 135. On a successful expedition, she could find coffee, canned foods, flour. When they do not find food, they eat snow, See 159.
[105] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* 112.
[106] Peri, *The War Within*, 41-66.
[107] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina,* 347.

material strain of wartime had broken her morally by forcing her to loot and by breaking her physically. This made her feel like the war had stolen her future and therefore, her only prospects lied in documenting the war. She explicitly stated that since she was unable to live a "normal" life, she decided to devote herself to witnessing the war.[108] Because the crisis transformed her, she construed herself as someone who needed to record it. Witnessing became part of her calling, as someone whose other perspectives had all been taken away.

2.1.3. Historical agent

Polina's diary fits Lejeune's idea of a diary that aims to freeze time, to accumulate traces of history. She stated the explicit goal of recording the events for posterity: "I will keep this book! It has to be given to a museum against war! I hope such a museum will be created one day!" [109] She positioned herself as a crucial witness of the war, protecting its future memory to make it available for public memorialization.[110]

She also placed herself in reference to Soviet culture, writing: “If my diary is found like the Leningrad girl’s, it will finally be understood that one cannot make war in their own country! Here is our Motherland! Here, we are united by powerful links: childhood, friendship, parents. One culture common to this earth… Invisible yet powerful links.”[111] Here, she explicitly compared her intent to Tanya Savicheva's, who was one of the most famous victims of the Leningrad siege Eleven-year-old Tanya’s “diary” only consists of nine lines, one on each page, in which she describes her family members deaths before her own death during an evacuation before the end of the war. The minimalist depiction of despair that emanated from the pages made it a symbol of the suffering of Leningrad. Savicheva’s diary became part of the historical cannon before the war was over, materially exhibited at the Piskarevskoe Memorial

[108] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* 454
[109] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* 155.
[110] The reality of this memorialization is the topic of the next chapter.
[111] Zherebtsova 71-72.

Cemetery.[112] Savicheva's incorporation into the war cannon extended into education: she is cited in the story of the siege of Leningrad in Russian textbooks.[113] Zherebtsova did not refer to details of Savicheva's experience. Instead, she invoked her as a staple reference of childhood memorialization and suffering. She wanted her diary to represent the suffering of Grozny like Savicheva had represented the suffering of Leningrad.

The reference to Savicheva shows Zherebtsova's self-perception as a significant historical actor, which resembles the two boys who chronicled the Hungarian revolution.[114] Unlike the Hungarian teenagers, she did not solely aim to document. Instead, she argued that her experience of suffering and documenting was meaningful because it intrinsically carried a message of peace.[115] The unfolding on war made her witness, which would, according to her, prove to a public audience that people should not fight wars. This made her in her practice as a diary-writer construct herself as the bearer of a message of peace in the world. This also points to the intrinsically moral standpoint she gave to her witnessing: it had the purpose of showing a wider audience what wrong and right were.

Her political message of peace was linked to Zherebtsova's perception of Chechnya as a region of "interethnic peace" in her childhood, before the first war, which had "evaporated" by 1999. [116] The reality of the pre-independence period was not one of complete ethnic peace, although mixed marriages were more frequent in the 1980s than ever. Between 1991 and 1993, more than 90 000 non-Chechens fled the Republic because of ethnic persecution.[117] Therefore, her characterization of pre-war Chechnya was not representative of reality. This idealization of

[112] Lisa Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myths, Memories, and Monuments*, (Cambridge University Press , 2009), 206.
[113] Dagmara Moskwa, "The Great Patriotic War in Russian History Textbooks," *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 0, no. 50 (December 31, 2018), https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.1650, 9.
[114] Kunt, "The Collaborative Illustrated Diaries of Two Preadolescent Boys During the 1956 Revolution," 102-105.
[115] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,* 71-72.
[116] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova,*71-72.
[117] Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, "Ideology and conflict: Chechen political nationalism prior to, and during, ten years of war," In *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus*,.(Routledge, 2007): 102.

the past could be linked to idealization of childhood. Crucially, the idea is embedded in the idea of the "Friendship of the Peoples," which was the Soviet paradigm of ethnic coexisting in the Soviet Union since Stalin.[118] This was a ubiquitous rhetoric, which promoted a folkish cultivation of Soviet nationalities and served as the imagined multinational community.[119] Polina's characterization of a cheerful, multinational Chechnya therefore echoed Soviet rhetoric of ethnic enthusiastic collaboration and trust.

In the previous quotes, Zherebtsova explicitly referred to the future of the diary as a published piece of literature. Interestingly, this claim of posterity did not regard only recording the history the war, but also to threaten a neighbor by possibly exposing her past behavior to the whole world. Over the course of the war, Zherebtsova showed her diary to a neighbor to prove her honesty in a dispute, using it as documentary evidence of a past event.[120] Therefore, the construction of the diary as an object of future publishing fulfilled the role of rectifying truth both on a historical level and on a personal level— and she constructed herself as someone rectifying truth in both cases.

2.1.4. Professional aspirations

In her study of the critical edition of Anne Frank's diary, Sally Charnow a youth diary is a "vehicle for self-actualization of a personal and, sometimes, a public, professional self."[121] We find this duality in Zherebtsova's diary. Her concerns largely revolved around personal issues, but her ambitions to become a professional writer also fed the diary process. The diary was a matter of survival, but it also pointed to literary ambitions and provides an experience in the art of writing. She compared herself with "historian-writers" like Karamzin, Solzhenitsyn,

[118] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire : Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Cornell University Press, 2001).
[119] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 431-432.
[120] Zherebtsova, 351
[121] Charnow, "Critical Thinking: Scholars Reread the Diary," 294

Merezhkovsky, Bulgakov, while not actually emulating their style.[122] While before the war, she wanted to study UFOs, she considered that the war and its desolation has made it her duty to document and to write.[123] Several times, she mentions the project of writing books about the war as her career plan: a book titled "*Analysis of the influence of military operations on civilian witnesses in armed conflict zones"* which would explain how the evil of war breaks people's spirit and contribute to crime, exposing her diary in a museum.[124]

Meeting someone with the same ambitions as her marked an occasion for Polina to show her craft. In June 2000, she met a young woman who was in the process of writing a book on the "1994-1995" war.[125] Polina was excited to show her the diary and poems she had been writing.[126] She hints at publishing her diary when she fought with a neighbor and argues that "she'll read about it in a book" in the future.[127] She attached great value to her diary and attached great importance to keeping the notebooks it was written on safe from potential attackers. The adolescent diary of Polina, placing the war as its breaking point in construction of the self and public morality not only allowed her to find meaning in witnessing the war, but also drove her to a professional career. This points to Polina's self-construction as an adolescent whose professional future give sense to her experience.

The experience of hunger and pain under war forced Polina to continuously chase for food and shelter and broke her moral and physical capacities, therefore robbing her of a potential future. Because of the toll of the war, her self-construction in the diary therefore relied on the construction of a new purpose: witnessing the war and laying the ground for the future memorialization of the conflict. This new articulation of the self as a historical actor came with a professional career, and a moralistic point of view on war. Her idealistic treatment of pre-war

122 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 224.
123 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 347.
124 Ibid, 456
125 Ibid, 242..
126 Ibid, 242.
127 Ibid, 351.

Grozny as a place of interethnic peace recalls Soviet rhetoric. The account of interethnic relations in wartime Grozny will shed a light on some of Polina's experiences and narratives around her experience of ethnicity,

2.2. Ethnic shifts

2.2.1. Interethnic tensions

Whereas the scholarship tends to focus on human rights abuses endured by Chechen civilians, the interethnic relationships between Chechens and remaining Russians, or other civilians scarcely appear.[128] Many Russians had left before 1999, which can lead to an assumption that there were just not many non-Chechens left in the Republic by the time the second war started. Polina's diary may account for many of the Russians who disappeared from the Republic, as people from mixed or Russian background pretended to be Chechen by adopting customs, at times going to the authorities and creating a new identity for themselves. Although her material conditions were dire, Polina primarily cited ethnic persecution as her reason for looking to leave the Republic: "The most important for us would be to leave Grozny with what is left of our stuff, because people who have a Russian name are getting more and more abused here."[129] Polina framed resentment against Russians like a virus brought about by the war: "The Chechen is infected with a virus. Hate against Russians. Even the best and the most tolerant are contaminated. The war introduced this disease, with stronger and stronger doses!"[130]

Except for scarce encounters with Russian soldiers, Polina and her mother mostly interacted with people who had a Chechen background. The family stayed on friendly terms with a few Chechens, despite being perceived as Russian.[131] Others, with whom they maintained good relations prior to the war, suddenly refused to salute them. [132] Polina often reminisced about how she used to get along with the neighbors who no longer address her and call for violence against her and her mom, at times calling them" miserable Russian creatures

[128] A few ethnic Russian civilians and other non-Chechen identities figure anecdotally in accounts from journalists, but they are not studied in the academic scholarship. See Nivat *Chienne de Guerre.*
[129] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina,* 376.
[130] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 432.
[131] Ibid, 50 ,
[132] Ibid, 58

that it was time to slaughter."[133] Early in the war Polina expressed understanding for the hostility against her, especially from people whose family members were killed by the Russian military. [134] While the violence of Russian forces against Chechen fighters and civilians provided Polina with an explanation for hostility against her, she also fought back against the people calling her names and beating her up at school or at home.[135]

Another explanation for harassment against Russians appeared in the second half of the diary, once the harshest months of winter had gone by. Moving from one building to another, she started to understand slandering and abuse as a tactic to drive Russians away from Chechnya and gain material and social capital.[136] She saw slanders and harassment drove people away from their apartment and could therefore be a way to acquire what is left inside. This was especially repulsive to her as she suspected her neighbor of wanting to get drunk with the money he would earn from the booty.[137] Additionally, slandering Russians as thieves and people with loose morals showed loyalty to the newly-crystallizing political order.[138] Self-interested hostility against Russians became a recurring motif for Polina, who grew convinced that people just wanted to get rid of them in order to continue stealing without being kept in check.[139] Interestingly, she mentioned instances of the same phenomenon from 1997, when someone had denounced her neighbor as an "enemy to the Chechen people" in order to obtain her apartment.[140] Following the same logic as with food, Polina qualified the violence against Russians civilians as morally reprehensible when motivated by greed and not by grief, which she felt is growing incessantly throughout the war.

[133] Ibid, 349.
[134] Ibid, 214, 415.
[135] Ibid, 308
[136] Ibid, 408
[137] Ibid, 376-377
[138] 408
[139] 362
[140] 395

Her narration denounced the humanitarian system in Chechnya. When she was unable to afford food or medication, she tried to resort to authorities or the Red Cross, both of which apparently refused to assist her because she did not fit the "categories" of people eligible for food banks – like "retiree" or "refugee."[141] This situation puts forward one of the paradoxes of ethnic Russians in this war: while ethnic Russians were advantaged when claiming refugee status in the rest of Russia, Russians in Chechnya were, according to her testimony, at a disadvantage in administrations.[142]

Part of the resentment against Polina and her mother stemmed from the perception that Russians received preferential treatment by Russian forces. That phenomenon is visible in Polina's account, albeit sparsely. Russian soldiers once caught her and let her go which prompted her to write that "speaking Russian and looking panicked were useful, for once."[143] Whereas she did not express any support for the Russian intervention in Grozny, the dense presence of Russian soldiers in the city in 2002 made her and her mother feel safer, because it made the neighbors "calm down, trembling with fear."[144] Polina noted than when the soldiers were there, the neighbors greeted her.[145]

When the army marched into Grozny, she did not think that being Russian was a particular privilege in the face of widespread violence against civilians. On the contrary, it seemed like neighborly resentment against Russians only intensified with the Russian takeover. In the Fall of 2000, she noted a pattern of retaliation: Russian soldiers got killed somewhere in the city, and the army retaliated by assassinating randomly chosen young people in the same neighborhood.[146] These retaliatory acts instilled terror in the entire civilian population, regardless of ethnicity. Whenever they heard about Russian soldiers being murdered, Polina

141 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina,* 312
142 Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya,* 105.
143 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 290.
144 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 364
145 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 364..
146 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 285,

and other civilians left the marketplace and ran for cover.[147] Despite feeling targeted by the "hate against Russians," she also noted that Chechen men were the target of kidnappings, which needed to be compensated and addressed by their female relatives.

2.2.2. Chechenization of society in Polina's perspective

One of the defining characteristics of the Second Chechen War was its "Chechenization," which was put in place as soon as Russians started controlling Grozny in January 2000.[148] This was a Russian strategy which aimed to bolster local support by implementing an ethnic Chechen political and paramilitary military elite that would be loyal to Moscow. This was a way for Russia to achieve some level of internal "normalization" in the Republic while delegitimizing independentist fighters.[149] Akhmad Kadyrov, the former pro-independence Mufti of Chechnya, turned on his former allies and sided with Moscow. He was appointed at the head of the Republic in 2000 and granted increasing power in order to track down all Wahhabi and secessionist elements.[150] The delegation of repression from federal forces to Chechen ones only accelerated in 2003-2004, which led scholars to debate the timespan of Chechenization. After the assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov 2004, his son Ramzan and his militia integrated into the Chechen police force, where they became famous for repression against the civilian population. This repression was not new to the zone: it was the continuation of the extrajudicial executions, arrests and torture conducted by Federal forces in the years prior. In the following part, I argue that the processes of Chechenization did not only occur in combatant leadership, but also in the ethnic presentation of civilians as early as 2000.

147 Ibid, 285
148 Hughes, *From Nationalism to Jihad* xiii
149 Le Huérou, et al Introruction, *Chechnya at War and Beyond:* "Violence in Chechnya: continuity and interruptions."
150 Richard Sakwa, "The Revenge of the Caucasus: Chechenization and the Dual State in Russia," *Nationalities Papers* 38 v (January 1, 2010): 601–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2010.498468.

The process of Chechenization in the leadership led to a forceful promotion of newfound Chechen "national" traditions later, in the 2000s and the 2010s.

The Chechenization of armed forces is observed by Polina as early as September 2001, when Chechen militia members marched with Russian forces.[151] Although the Chechen militia was meant to support the Russian takeover of the city, individual members of the militia maintained poor relations with Russian civilians like Polina. The neighbor being a militia member, his wife maintained cordial communication in Russian, however his young son refused to enter "a Russian house."[152] Confirming Szczepanikova's assumptions about stark differences between generations, interethnic tensions and their manifestations differed greatly depending on age. Among her own generation, Polina noted that speaking Russian had become shameful and a way to insult her. Whereas most adults communicated in Russian, adolescents preferred the Chechen language.[153]

The Soviet antireligious campaigns in Muslim societies led to the "privatization" of religious practice. Whereas the public sphere was "Sovietized," the private sphere remained "traditional."[154] According to Szczepanikova's research, this phenomenon led Chechen women to internalize different gender norms that those espoused by Russian women in Chechnya. Male and female activities in were kept separate, with women being in charge of all the housework, and subordinate to their husband's family.[155] In Polina's case, we observe the reversal of these shifts: the performance of Islamic Chechen identity became necessary in the public sphere, while the private sphere was obliterated by the war. This led to Russian and Chechen women becoming virtually indistinguishable and embracing similar codes of conduct in public, based on a Chechen model of behavior.

151 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 385
152 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina,* 414.
153 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina* 503-504
154 Szczepanikova, "Chechen women in War and Exile," 757.
155 Szczepanikova, "Chechen women in War and Exile," 757.
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The public appearance and persona of the diarist is hard to envision if the diarist does not discuss it. Because of this quirk of the diary format, Polina only mentioned once that her mother and her used Chechen first names in their daily lives. Most Russian women they interacted with resorted to the same technique in order to avoid harassment.[156] According to her, Russians become "invisible" and have "Chechenized" their outer appearance.[157] This means, for example, that all women wore a headscarf. Polina also recorded a fascinating phenomenon of people switching their official nationality in order to blend in: "Now links with Russians are shameful! They are carefully dissimulated. Some women change passports, become "Chechen." They change neighborhood and invent a family legend… They do not want to leave the Republic, but they want to protect themselves and their children."[158] In addition, many people with mixed background concealed their Russian relatives, therefore proceeding to an apparent ethnic uniformization of the Republic.

Assimilating into Chechen rites did not guarantee integration. Polina's knowledge of the Chechen language did not make her more liked in the market.[159] A Russian man who converted to Islam is killed although he was "invested in faith" and had received the authorization to marry a Chechen girl.[160] When Polina looks for a Muslim cemetery, she realized it was hard to bury a Russian among Chechens.[161]

2.2.3. Individual ethnic shifts in Polina: Sovietized Islam?

One fascinating aspect of Polina's account is that beyond the need to externally present as Chechen, she articulated a fluid ethnic identity deeply connected to the Caucasus. She questioned and performed her ethnicity in several occurrences. "Personally, I feel neither Russian nor Chechen… But I'm closer to Chechens because I do not anyone know with Russian

156 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 22, 376, 539-540.
157 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,,273.
158 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 432.
159 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,456.
160 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,389.
161 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 389-390.

nationality. I have never crossed the borders of the Republic."[162] Her self-identification was strongly anti-national: she identified in the diary as a “child of the world” and refused the idea of ethnic purity through blood[163]. She thought that people had overstated and oversimplified the importance of their ethnicity, when actually many of them came from a mixed background.[164]

She was nevertheless attached to the Chechen land, framing it as "our" motherland and the only thing she knew.[165] In the diary, the identification with Chechnya relied on aesthetic representations. She often cited the Chechen bard Timur Mutsuraev as an inspiration. She disliked “the emancipated women of the West,” and liked to wear a headscarf as a “romantic, tender and mysterious” look.[166] She even insisted on wearing the headscarf after the pro-Russian takeover, which got her in trouble at school: the school principal, who used to scold girls for not wearing a headscarf started scolding them for wearing one and she refused to comply.[167] With this, she showed her self-conception as a girl morally attached to modesty throughout the regime changes.

Her claim to identity was one of actively choosing to affiliate with certain aspects of religions. She appeared linked to Islam: she enjoyed fasting for its capacity to "bolster character," called to Allah to protect her friend and dreamed of the Prophet Mohammad often.[168] She emphasized how much she knew from books: "I really like zoroatrism […] I know the Bible and the Torah. I consider that among all the Russian translations of the Quran, Kratoshkovsky's is the best."[169] Her performance of being highly educated about several religions and knowing "all the Russian translations of the Quran" appears like an argument of

[162] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 433.
[163] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 21.
[164] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 199.
[165] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 431.
[166] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 21.
[167] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 308.
[168] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 295-299.
[169] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova* , 378

moral superiority over "fanatics" who fought on religious grounds. She performed this superiority in a way that is reminiscent of Soviet "culturedness," [*kul'turnost'*], which valued cultural refinement as a capital moral virtue.[170]

This idea that religion should be the result of a conscious choice, and not of an imposition: "Does the Constitution not give the liberty to choose one's faith and morals? Or do laws only exist on paper? I know that religion has always been a support to the state. In case of fanaticism, it is a nuisance… But every religious confession is a bundle of moral laws."[171] Therefore, Polina's claim to Islamic moral identity were one of enlightened education, rather than one of inherited culture. This idea was therefore related to being cultured, to understand every religion and to practice it as "a bundle of moral laws", as opposed to following it in a fanatic manner.

Beyond explicit reflections on ethnicity, Polina performed ethnicity a certain way in the diary. She took inspiration in and commented on classical Russian writers like Akhmatova.[172] She liked Russian authors who concerned themselves with the Caucasus and assessed Pushkin and Lermontov to be "ideologically close to the Wahhabis" without giving any further explanations. [173] She might have meant that they were outsiders who romanticized the Caucasus and its freedom fighters, and perceived it as a space of struggle to be dominated.[174]

In the same logic as with her interest in Chechen and Islamic culture, Polina granted a place in her diary to people who overlooked ethnic considerations. She wrote at length about Chechen fighters who filled up buckets of water and proclaimed that "water is a gift of god to

170 See Michael David-Fox, "What Is Cultural Revolution?: Key Concepts and the Arc of Soviet Cultural Transformation, 1910s–1930s," in *Crossing Borders*, Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 104–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155jp44.8.
171 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 378.
172 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 224.
173 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 457.
174 Lermontov and Pushkin contributed to the popular representation of a "freedom loving, savage yet brave and honourable Chechens and their fellow mountain people" both in Russia and in the West. See John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 102, https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000322937.

man, no matter his ethnicity."[175] They appeared as momentary saviors of the community, cheerfully laughing in the Russian and the Chechen languages. They did not fraternize with women, invoking purity."[176] Polina noticed that he was a "Chechen who looks like a knight from a Russian tale," with fair eyes and red hair.[177] This romanticized image of the Chechen freedom fighter who did not dwell on ethnic categories but lived a traditional, morally pure life contrasts with the Chechen neighbors who stole, drank, and behaved obscenely. It also stood in sharp contrast with "Arab" soldiers the Chechen fighters mention, who were suspected of wanting to abduct girls. They described the "Arabs" as people who are wearing black clothes and black beards. [178] The ethnic categorization in Polina's diary derogatorily portrayed the Wahhabi faction of the Chechen rebellion, as opposed to other combatants. This dissociation echoed the increased Russian discourse of increasing influence "Arab" and "Islamist" mercenaries in Chechnya, as fundamentalist groups had committed terrorist attacks in Russia.[179]

Polina's self-construction relied on the rejection of ethnic categories and identification with people who accepted and acknowledged interethnic relations, while following a moral code that was based on religious texts and claiming her attachment to the Chechen land. In contrast, Polina strongly despised "fanatics" who refused to acknowledge the moral benefit of different religions. Her performance of religious enlightenment is reminiscent of the Soviet discourse of "culturedness," although she does not explicitly refer to it. Polina's strong moral rejection of ethnic-based violence related to her vision of the war as an attack on morals, since in her opinion, the ethnic persecution of Russians only took root with the war.

[175] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 113.
[176] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 117.
[177] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 117.
[178] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 113.
[179] John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 11, https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000322937.

2.3.Gendered considerations

2.3.1. Gendered culture in 1990s Chechnya

It would be hard to determine what a "Chechen" role for women would entail when the Republic had been, in the span of ten years, under influences of the decentralized clan-based tradition of "*adat,*" Soviet ideology, and fundamentalist Islamic influences.[180] The clan-based structure of *adat* meant that male family members determined Chechen women's way to dress and to behave. In Banner's study, most Chechen women followed *adat* and therefore dressed the way their husbands or fathers encouraged them to, which could be either with or without traditional Islamic features.[181] Rather than following a strict religious code, it seemed more important for women to follow their family's law.

The Soviet state had the project to undermine religious influence in the Caucasus, which meant seceding from conservative understandings of marriage, women entering the workforce, and lowering the birthrate. The implementation of these policies was met with resistance, even when the entire Chechen population was deported to Kazakhstan between 1944 and 1957. Chechens took pride in defeating the Soviet policies of by maintaining a traditional family structure with numerous children, therefore rebuilding the "nation" demographically.[182] During and after deportation, the Chechen birthrate remained higher than in the rest of the Soviet Union, and adherence to Sufi Islam and clan organization still prevailed in the rural regions and the mountains. Cities like Grozny, on the other hand, were spaces of Soviet cosmopolitanism, inhabited by a Sovietized population, 55.8% of them of ethnic Russian or Slavic origins in 1989.[183] The Soviet state provided some level of legal and social services for women, and

[180] "Chechen traditions" are usually equated with the indigenous "*adat*" and Islamic discourses. (Raubisko, 100)
[181] Francine Banner, "'Beauty Will Save the World': Beauty Discourse and the Imposition of Gender Hierarchies in the Post-War Chechen Republic," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 9 i (January 1, 2009): 35–36.
[182] Williams, *Inferno in Chechnya*, 71–72.
[183] Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 122.

therefore some independence for individual women from family or clan structures, especially in the capital.[184]

In Russia, until 1986, the authoritarian Soviet regime supported the family and regulated sexuality. With *glasnost* came the revival of sexuality: Soviet sex culture became freer but ripe with anomie, moral panic, the revival of both sexual culture and sexophobia.[185] In a study from 2000 on young Russian's attitudes towards sex and marriage, respondents from the same generation as Zherebtsova viewed sex as not confined to marriage.[186] They ascribed no particular importance to virginity and refused to link sex to marriage. On the contrary, the respondents ascribed value to sexual activity before marriage, as a sexually active partner was perceived more desirable than a chaste or a virgin one.[187]

Clearly, the moral rules around Polina at the same time in Grozny steered far from this understanding of sexuality. Polina did not write much on the topic explicitly, but she strongly disapproved of "free relations" and women who dressed "vulgarly."[188] The female body as the vector of sexuality was notably absent in her account, while it was the most important image associated with it in the young Russian sample.[189]

According to the sociologist Francine Banner, in patriarchal societies "where the purity of the nation relies on the purity of its women, the revival of the national body is contingent on the restoration of a moral female body."[190] After the wars, the purity of the female body had been emphasized a cardinal Chechen value. A 300-people survey found that respect for women is the second most sacred Chechen value, after justice.[191]

[184] Banner, "'Beauty Will Save the World,'" 184.
[185] Elena Omelchenko, "My Body, My Friend: Provinvial Youth between the Sexual and the Gender Revolution," in *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Sarah Ashwin (London: Routledge, 2000), 103.
[186] Omelchenko, 106.
[187] Ibid, 114- 115
[188] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina,* 212-213.
[189] Ibid, 104.
[190] Banner, "'Beauty Will Save the World,'" 35–36.
[191] Banner 39.

In matters of the heart, Polina explicitly positioned herself as morally upright, and informed by romantic representations of the Orient. She appreciated Aladdin's respectful behavior towards women, encouraging them to cover themselves. She longed for him to rescue her from men with low morals, and compares their relationship to an "Oriental tale."[192] She also proudly wrote that she "followed the Chechen code of conduct" when it came to courtship.[193] Linked to her representation of Chechen culture, her construction in gender had an romantic, Orientalist frame to it.

2.3.2. Family life and education

Szczepanikova conducted research into religious identities and gender practices for different generations of Chechen women living in Europe. Most Chechen women from Polina's generation —born between 1981 and 1992, called here the "war generation"— had decided to get married early in life and immediately start a family. In most cases, young women dropped out of school once they got married.[194] In Szczepanikova's study, this tendency towards early marriage seemed to be a part of "highly conservative gender practices," which also included an having numerous children and following conservative codes of Islamic dress. A minority of women from the war generation aimed to study and pursue a career, which corresponded more to the life paths of women raised under the Soviet era generations. They had gone to high school and worked before getting married.

This older generation of women perceived the traditionalist shift as a direct consequence of the war. According to them, the covering Islamic garments for women were not part of Chechen culture before the 1990s —women preferred tighter clothing and high heels. This is not to say that gender roles in the Soviet period were devoid of Chechen identity, but rather that the public

192 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 205.
193 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 327.
194 Szczepanikova, "Chechen Refugees in Europe: How Three Generations of Women Settle in Exile," Section "The war generation: new religious identities and gender practices."

presentation of Chechen women, and therefore their education and professional life were Sovietized. Under the Soviet period, Chechen women worked, but they were still expected to "carry" the blood of the Chechen nation against the Russian invader. Family structures remained crucial and large families were widespread.[195]

Polina frequently wrote about Chechen girls getting married at a young age –between fourteen and fifteen.[196] Although this had already been mentioned in the early pages of the diary, she made the argument later on that the war increased the prevalence of child marriages. She interpreted the situation as caused by the "whip of war," which made many girls marry even younger, at the ages of thirteen or fourteen years.[197] She provided more or less direct explanations for this phenomenon. Most notably, men were scarce in the Chechen republic at that time, and therefore girls would rather "hurry up" and get married than end up alone.[198] Another was that marrying young was a traditional "Chechen custom."[199]

Polina preferred the idea to pursue higher education, and to "choose" a husband for herself afterwards."[200] The two paths were therefore starkly set out in Polina's mind. A girl either got married around fourteen years of age and quit school, or she pursued higher education and will would commit to a husband afterwards. While this cleavage might seem simplistic, Szczpanikova's research into Chechen women in exile confirms this strong dichotomy. Women from Polina's age generally preferred to get married as way to compensate for the uncertainty brought about by the war. While education was impossible in wartime Grozny, marriage was a way to secure one's future, and it was seen as necessary to secure it early on.[201]

[195] In 1989, 46% of families in the Chechen Republic had five or more children, compared to 3% of families in Russia. See Szczepanikova, "Chechen Women in War and Exile," 757.
[196] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,, 20.
[197] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,, 320.
[198] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*., 320.
[199] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,, 95, 232.
[200] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*,95.
[201]Szczepanikova, "Chechen Refugees in Europe: How Three Generations of Women Settle in Exile," Section "The war generation: new religious identities and gender practices**."**

A woman, trying to settle Polina with her son, made the "flattering proposition, for Chechen standards" to let her finish the ninth grade before the wedding.[202] Polina expressed ambitions that were closer to the Soviet generation's conception of womanhood: her education came before marriage. At the same time, she acknowledged in her diary that this proposition represented a compromise. This was the first proposal in the diary in September 1999, and Polina did not explicitly condemn it —rather, she seemed flattered. Her mother nevertheless demanded that she completes with her schooling first.[203] In the later entries, she told Aladdin that she wished to receive a university education beforehand.[204]

However, as the war progressed, Polina had a hard time imagining herself married at all, let alone at a young age. She wrote: "I know that I will not be happy anyway. I couldn't be. Because in a way, I am dead."[205] Her reflections on marriage were therefore not only delayed by schooling, but also impacted by the war. It took her away her ability to project a happy romantic life, although she did relentlessly write about Aladdin as her romantic interest.

Her diary showed that although the war prevented her from projecting a romantic future, she projected herself as having a professional life, which set her apart from what she perceived as the experience of other girls in Chechnya. Her aspirations echo those of women who grew up in the Soviet era, and who saw marriage as a step taken after education and professionalization.

2.3.3. Sexual collaboration and anti-Soviet, anti-Chechen morality

Beyond the articulation of one's preferred life as a woman, the conceptions of gender in the diary strongly appeared in the negative examples of Aza and Lina. Chechen by origin yet non-religious to Polina's despair, the two women featured in numerous entries. They had lived

[202] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 20..
[203] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 19.
[204] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 95.
[205] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 203.

in the same building as Polina and her mother since before the war and had a previous history of troubled relations with them. I argue that these women feature so prominently because Polina fixated on them as representatives of moral decay in wartime situation.

Polina carefully recorded their actions and reflected on their moral character. Aza and Lina often stole, slandered Polina, and they often had men –soldiers from both sides— over at night. One of the most striking aspects in Aza and Lina's characters was the consistency and straightforwardness with which Polina confronted their sexual behavior. She used vile language to describe them, whereas she aimed to be a cultured woman who did not get angry.

Polina judged them for "living with soldiers" and receiving soldier rations, much like Soviet diarists were judging "cafeteria girls" or "blockade wives" who had a prime access to food in famine-stricken Leningrad.[206] While Grozny residents were undergoing large-scale shortages of food and Polina was starving, the girls partied with Russian soldiers and copious amounts of food, alcohol, smoking, and sex.[207] She portrayed Aza and Lina not as victims of food shortages in the way that others like Polina were. On the contrary, they were recorded as people who decadently indulged in immoral pleasures, whereas other civilians were suffering. Their immorality was symptomized by their sexual promiscuity: Polina described them as enjoying the company of men and obtaining material favors, i.e. copious amounts of food, access to apartments under armed protection, and luxury merchandise like fur coats.[208] With the same logic as with people who looted in order to enrich themselves copiously, Polina strongly condemned their decadence and as a teenager, she partly built her identity against their example of immoral womanhood.

In the Soviet Union, young women who partook in fighting were demanded to remain morally pure. Girls in the Komsomol were encouraged to be pleasant with men, but to avoid

206 Peri, *The War Within*, 145-146; Zherebtsova, Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 163.
207 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 140-143.
208 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 111, 131, 140, 183, 307, 317.

vulgarity —i.e. painted nails and jewelry— and were not to engage in sexual activity. Womanly abstinence was supposed to prove the "culturedness" and therefore moral superiority of the Soviet side.[209] Polina posited a similar idea of abstinent and moral superiority when she described Aza and Lina as ignorant of Islamic law.[210] Their ignorance reinforced their position as immoral women, who defied both Soviet and Chechen morality.

The idea of fraternizing with men from both sides intersects at the gendered and the ethnic problems of the war, because Chechen tradition saw in the honor of women the repository of the honor of Chechnya.[211] Aza and Lina were not only guilty of having sex with enemy soldiers, they also disregarded the moral code of Chechnya, which banned promiscuity. Insults against Polina sometimes consisted in accusing her of sexually engaging with Russian and Chechen soldiers, which she perceived as a slanderous accusation that aimed to tarnish her name. Considering that the honor of Chechnya relies on that of its women, the women were perceived as sullied both because they are sexually promiscuous but also because they are betraying their nation to the enemy. Interestingly, Aza and Lina did not seem to be the target of anyone's wrath beyond Polina's.[212] This speaks both to Polina's internalization of strict gender codes of purity but also to the perception of a lack of moral policing among Chechens, which, knowing the cultural context, seems very surprising.

At time, Aza and Lina redistributed food to neighbors, which could explain the lack of wider criticism from neighbors. They consistently feed older Russian women who live in the building and give flour and money to Polina on several occasions.[213] This does not make them particularly more sympathetic to Polina, for whom they embodied moral corruption: they were

209 Brandon M. Schechter, "'Girls' and 'Women'. Love, Sex, Duty and Sexual Harassment in the Ranks of the Red Army 1941-1945," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies. Pipss.Org*, no. Issue 17 (February 25, 2016): 13, https://doi.org/10.4000/pipss.4202.
210 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 308.
211 Banner, "'Beauty Will Save the World,'" 39.
212 Some people speak behind their backs, but nobody insults them out loud like Polina does on multiple occasions. Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 143, 317.
213 Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 111, 136-137.

obscene, shifting allegiances, not religious, liars, etc.… Polina's vision of womanhood is opposite to that, although she sometimes is vulgar too. However, she dislikes her own vulgarity and temper and often wishes she could "get along with everyone" and take things with more self-control.[214]

By their disregard for norms of discretion, reserve and purity, as well as their affiliation with soldiers of all sides, they violated Chechen conventions, and the Chechen neighbors were complicit. In addition, by their lack of culture —on Islam!—, their enjoyment of all earthly and material pleasures, and their amoral behavior they embodied anti-Soviet womanhood. Polina's self-construction as a woman is strongly built against them, although she sometimes shows her own moral flaw by insulting them.

2.4. Chapter Conclusion

Polina's formative years for moral standing happened as she navigated between hunger, warfare, and ethnically-based harassment. She conceptualized the war as the supreme fracture in self-construction: it prevented her from constructing herself as a woman, and it provided the material conditions for moral values to collapse. The war, because of the absolute quality of its fracture, also gave Polina her calling and professional aspiration: to be a witness through writing. This perspective of professionally witnessing appeared to her as the only option in a world where every moral and physical good had been, in her mind, obliterated by the conflict.

The war had enabled looting and enrichment, while others were starving, ethnic persecution, and sexual collaboration. These are all opposed to Soviet values, of disregarding material possessions and of embracing the "friendship of the Peoples." Polina, while never explicitly referring to the Soviet Union, echoed Soviet values in her moral judgments of materialism and promiscuity, and in her fluid approach to ethnicity and religion.

[214] Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 240.

Part 3: The role of the published diary in the memorialization of the war

When Zherebtsova's diary was published, it induced reviews, controversy, and reports on the controversy in the press both domestically and abroad. These articles, which either tend to promote the diary, or stress aspects of debates surrounding it, allow for the creation of a public discourse around the diary and, by extension, the war. Zherebtsova's diary's publication significantly impacted the landscape of war memorialization, since. This part will investigate the ways in which reactions across countries and political persuasions, promoted existing narratives about the Chechen war and fostered the creation of new ones. Because of the nature of publication, this question concerns memory-making beyond the scale of the state. In its place, this memory takes place in literary circles, and in the media –both in print and online.

3.1. The "Grey Elephant in the Dark Room:" a heterogenous silence over the Chechen wars[215]

In order to understand the stakes of publication, I will first focus on the memorialization –or lack thereof—of the wars in Russia and Chechnya. This will problematize the idea of "silence" in official memorialization strategies. Evidently, these wars are recent events, and the regimes produced at the end of the second war —Putin and Kadyrov as the strongmen of Russia and Chechnya— are still in place. The memory of the war is charged with tremendous political implications, because it speaks to the foundational act of their power, as we will see below.

According to Danilova, the memory of Chechen wars is virtually absent from official discourse and can therefore be called the "grey elephant in the dark room."[216] She claimed that the conflict is scarcely covered in the media and the topic is generally avoided. This creates a "collective forgetting" shared by veterans of the conflict, the government, and the public at large. Memorials to Russian soldiers who died in Chechnya exist in military cemeteries, but

[215] Danilova, “Victims and Heroes,” last paragraph.
[216] Danilova, “Victims and Heroes,” last paragraph.

they decontextualize the war while presenting the soldiers as victims and heroic defenders of the Russian nation. While soldiers of the Second War gained the status of national heroes, the calls of conscripts' mothers to get a trace of their missing sons have not been addressed by the power. With neither veterans, bereaved families, or official discourse addressing the details and issues of the Second war, public discussion around the conflict is hard to imagine.[217]

However, when researching Russian newspapers and cultural media, one can find a significant number of publications on the Chechen wars with various vantage points.[218] Several Russian movies and TV series were produced on the conflict since 1996. Although visual media generally adopted the point of view of the state with one-dimensional heroic Russian soldiers, they contributed to public discourse on the war.[219] In the same context, Zherebtsova published her diaries, and subsequently several books in Russia, even after she left the country.

These cultural productions can appear surprising when scholars made the aforementioned argument that Russian society, as a whole, avoided the topic. Nevertheless, the independent press in Russia had been reporting when the wars were ongoing, and has been since then. Anna Politkovskaya won prestigious awards and international recognition for her investigative work on Chechnya in *Novaya Gazeta.* She raised awareness both in Russia and abroad on the obliteration of Grozny, systemic hostage taking, mutilation of soldiers and rape throughout the Republic.[220] Her reporting meant that least in the early 2000s, an unofficial version of events was distributed and discussed throughout the country. After her death, *Novaya*

[217] Danilova, "Victims and Heroes," section "From victims paratroopers to hero-paratroopers".
[218] Arkady Babcehnko's account of the horror of the Chechen wars as a Russian soldier was published in the Russian literary magazine *Noviy Mir* and then put in book form. See Arkadiy Babchenko, *One Soldier's War* (Grove Press, 2007).
[219] Erik Vlaeminck, "Islamic Masculinities in Action: The Construction of Masculinity in Russian Visual Culture about the Chechen Wars," *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 2 (March 15, 2019): 248–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1564544.
[220] Politkovskaya and Crowfoot, *A Dirty War*.

Gazeta continued reporting on Chechnya in the present and in the war, despite numerous threats from the regime.[221]

However, since the beginning of the second war, the state worked to control the narrative over the second war. Media outlets that reported on it were consistently harassed by tax authorities and Russian reporters harassed, sometimes killed.[222] Before Politkovskaya's assassination in 2006, her version of events was pushed away from the mainstream. The marginalization of her account was facilitated by large-scale terrorist attacks. They left a profound mark on the public and eased the acceptation of the official state narrative of the invasion as necessary, anti-terrorist intervention.[223] In addition, the fate of Chechnya was considered a "peripheral" problem to the Russian public, although it was entangled with terrorism in Russia.[224]

The power of this framing of the Chechen issue increased with the power of the state in the media, which is here central to our discussion of the introduction of Polina in historical narratives. It is important to remember that whereas the first Chechen war took place in a time of unprecedented freedom and diversity in the Russian media, the end of the second Chechen war coincided with the gradual concentration of media outlets in the hands of the state.[225]

Furthermore, in the 2000s and 2010s, Putin and Medvedev reinforced the frame of the Second Chechen "campaign" as the rectification of the mistakes of the first war, which essentially became an example of Yeltsin-era chaos.[226] In movies, the story of the second war has been one of reintegration of the "good Chechens" into Russian history.[227]

221 Elena Milashina, " 'Ya — killer Kadyrova...' ['I am Kadyrov's Killer']," *Novaya Gazeta*, February 15, 2020, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/02/15/83940-ya-killer-kadyrova.
222 Theodore P. Gerber and Sarah E. Mendelson, "Casualty Sensitivity in a Post-Soviet Context: Russian Views of the Second Chechen War, 2001-2004," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2008): 39.
223 Gregory Carleton, "War Neverending," in *Russia: The Story of War* (Harvard University Press, 2017), e-book, section 'Call of Duty'.
224 Gerber and Mendelson, "Casualty Sensitivity in a Post-Soviet Context," 45.
225 Gerber and Mendelson, "Casualty Sensitivity in a Post-Soviet Context,"44-45.
226 Olga Malinova, "Framing the Collective Memory of the 1990s as a Legitimation Tool for Putin's Regime," *Problems of Post-Communism* (2020): 7-8.
227 Vlaeminck, "Islamic Masculinities in Action,": 261; Carleton, "War Neverending."

Therefore, the context in which Zherebtsova was published was not one of complete silence over the war, but of reduced alternatives of deviation from the state version. A 2008 study of the public opinion over the conflict found that despite the government's domination over media coverage of the war, Russians were not overwhelmingly in support of the war as it unfolded between 2001 and 2004. Word-of-mouth stories and investigative reports could go against the generally distrusted official version, but did not always provide a coherent alternative narrative.[228]

3.2. Publishing the books

Before publishing it in the form of a book, Zherebtsova started out by publishing excerpts of her diary in newspapers. She often claimed that multiple publishing houses refused to publish the book, fearing "problems with the government," because of the taboo around Chechen topic.[229] In the fall of 2010, the small publisher Detektiv-Press, which specializes in history books and memoirs, accepted to publish the section of the diary covering October 1999 to December 2002. This section contains Polina's experience of the Second War, before she moved to Stavropol. This was a small print —2000 copies— in a widely unknown, nor politically-affiliated publishing house. The editors did not provide a preface or any contextualization in their version.[230]

3.2.1. Addressing the source problem

The pitfall of using a published diary as a historical source is the lack of information as to what has been fabricated, or heavily tampered with in the diary, and at what stages in the edition process. This is even more complicated when the diarist is alive, and therefore has a

228 Gerber and Mendelson, "Casualty Sensitivity in a Post-Soviet Context," 66–67.
229 Miriam Elder, "The Second Chechen War: A Grozny Teenager's Diary," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2011, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/30/second-chechen-war-teenagers-diary.
230 Zherebtsova, *Dnevnik Zherebtsovoi Poliny [Polina Zherebtsova's Diary]*.

stake in keeping certain secrets away from readers, to avoid certain repercussions on their life.[231]

In the press, Zherebtsova admitted to editing parts of her diary, but she claimed to have only "minimized the description of her emotions," in order to let the reader "form their own opinion." She argued she had not "processed" it for the audience.[232] This is a contradictory statement: editing out "emotional" parts, either because she deems them useless or because she wants to hide something is still a kind of processing.

As we saw in the first chapter, a diary is always a mediation of experience, a kind of performance in self-construction. Additionally, children can sometimes edit parts of their diaries as they see fit. Crucially, a child editing out parts of his diary will not edit in the same way as an adult—perceptions of what is fit to go in change. In the case of Polina, her self-presentation in the edited piece of work was possibly mediated by a political agenda closer to her adult opinions, rather than her childhood ones. Following this, she could have emphasized certain aspects of her experiences, and left out parts that she deemed shameful or useless.

Any diary could be considered like a forgery until the manuscript is made available for consultation. In Zherebtsova's case, the manuscript was not made readily available, but human rights activists Svetlana Gannushkina and Stanislav Bozhko testified to having seen the manuscript and confirmed the authenticity of the published work.[233] However, I have to acknowledge that I do not know the extent to which Zherebtsova edited her manuscript for the published version. My messages to ask her about the details of the "processing" were left unanswered. However, one clue in seeing the amount of processing is her consistency between

231 Andrew Hassam, "Reading Other People's Diaries," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 439, https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.56.1.435.
232 "V Moskve Predstavlena Unikal'naya Kniga Dnevnikovykh Zapisey Ochevidtsa Voyny v CHechne [In Moscow, the Presentation of a Unique Diary of an Eyewitness to the War in Chechnya]," *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, October 26, 2011, https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/194618/.
233 "V Moskve Predstavlena Unikal'naya Kniga Dnevnikovykh Zapisey Ochevidtsa Voyny v CHechne [In Moscow, the Presentation of a Unique Diary of an Eyewitness to the War in Chechnya]."

Polina in the diary and her speech as an adult: as we will see below, Polina sometimes contradicts her diary in recent interviews.[234]

3.2.2. Original reception

Despite its small circulation, the diary soon became a controversial document, and its authenticity was put in question. Following the publication in 2011, Zherebtsova was harassed and threatened by mail, telephone and online.[235] She was physically assaulted in Moscow, and her husband was violently attacked in a separate incident. Due to these strenuous conditions, she decided to move to Finland.

In 2014, she published a larger version of the diary, spanning 1994 to 2004. This opus, titled *Ant in a Glass Jar* covered the two wars, as well as her life as a refugee in Stavropol.[236] The diary was also translated and published in France (2013 and 2015), Finland (2014), Germany, Ukraine, Lithuania, (2015) the Czech Republic (2016), Estonia, Bulgaria (2017) and Poland (2018).[237]

Zherebtosva received critical acclaim in the Russian literary world. She was shortlisted for the Andrei Sakharov Award for "Journalism as an Act of Conscience", awarded by

[234]On another note, Polina Zherebtsova's entire career is based on writing books about Chechnya. Her diaries preceded several works of fiction, which were also heavily inspired by her life. One could argue that if Polina needed to fabricate an account, she would do it in her fiction writing rather than in a supposedly real diary. Her fictions include Polina Zherebtsova, *Tonkaya serebristaya nit': rasskazy [Fine silver thread: stories]*, Novaja proza (Moskva: Izdatel′stvo AST, 2015) and Polina Zherebtsova, *45-ya parallel' [45th parallel]* (Char′kov: Folio, 2017).

[235] Elder, "The Second Chechen War."

[236] Polina Zherebtsova, *Muravey v Steklyannoy Banke: CHechenskiye Dnevniki 1994–2004 [Ant in a Glass Jar: Chechen Diaries 1994–2004]* (Vremya, 2018).

[237] Polina Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*; Polina Zherebtsova, *Sodan sirpaleet - Tytön päiväkirja Tšetšeniasta* (Into Kustannus Oy, 2014); Polina Zherebtsova, *Le journal de Polina Jerebtsova: dédié aux dirigeants de la Russie d'aujourd'hui*, trans. Véronique Patte (Paris: 10-18, 2015); Polina Zherebtsova, *Murakha u sklyaniy bantsi. Chechens'ki shchodenniki 1994-2004.* (Klub Simeynoho Dozvi, 2015),; Polina Zherebtsova, *Polinas Tagebuch*, ed. Olaf Kühl, 1. Aufl (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2015); Polina Zherebtsova, *Polinos dienoraštis* (Tyto Alba, 2015; Polina Zherebtsova, *Deníky Poliny Žerebcovové: Děvčátko uprostřed čečenské války* (bizbooks, 2016); Polina Zherebtsova, *Chechenski dnevnitsy 1994-2004 [Chechen Diaries 1994-2004]* (Avangard-Print, 2017),; Polina Zherebtsova, *Mrówka w słoiku. Dzienniki czeczeńskie 1994-2004* (Osrodek Karta, 2018).

These are translations of either or both Russian versions, depending on the country. In English and in Georgian, the diary is not published under the form of a book but excerpts have been translated and published in newspapers.

Moscow's Central House of Journalism.[238] *Novaya Gazeta* nominated another Zherebtsova book for their literary prize, and she was on the long list of the Yasnaya Polyana literary award.[239]

In 2018, the diary was adapted for stage by Semyon Serzin in Yekaterinburg and in April 2019 by the Perm Children's Pilgrim Theater and performed in Tyumen, in Saint Petersburg and in the Sakharov center in Moscow.[240] The children's performance led to an in-depth *Novaya Gazeta* article, in which the young actresses answered questions about their motivations to perform.[241] Despite the publicization of these performances, Zherebtsova argued that her adaptations were always pulled out at the last moment by theater managers in the metropoles.[242] She believes that her story is kept away from the capitals and from historical significance by the powers in place.[243]

Similarly, Zheretbsova believes that the state-affiliated press publicizing her debate with people who refute her account constitutes a calculated way to smear her reputation.[244] She does not address the fact that most reviews of her work, from the state-media and the opposition alike, are positive. Furthermore, she believes that the people who attacked her in the streets of Moscow were part of the military, and that those who harassed her on the phone were protected

[238] Not to be confused with The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, given by the European Parliament.
[239] "Eto Idet Voyna. Kuda Ona Idet? [This Is a War. Where Does She Go?]," *Novaya Gazeta*, July 16, 2016, http://novayagazeta.spb.ru/articles/10453/.
[240] "SHkol'nitsa Iz Oktyabr'skoy Shkoly Stala Artistkoy Studii «Piligrim» [A Schoolgirl from the October School Became an Artist of the Studio 'Pilgrim']," prochad.ru, March 5, 2020, http://prochad.ru/news/media/2020/3/5/shkolnitsa-iz-oktyabrskoj-shkolyi-stala-artistkoj-studii-piligrim/, V Moskve pokazhut spektakl' po «CHechenskim dnevnikam» Poliny ZHerebtsovoy [In Moscow, they will show a performance 'based on" Chechen Diaries "by Polina Zherebtsova], accessed May 25, 2020, https://etokavkaz.ru/news/58159.
[241] Maria Bashmakova and Elena Luk'yanova, «O chechenskoy voyne ya ne znala nichego…» ["I did not know anything about the Chechen war ..."], *Novaya Gazeta*, February 12, 2020, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/02/12/83882-o-chechenskoy-voyne-ya-ne-znala-nichego.
[242] "Voyna i Mir Poliny Zherebtsovoy [Polina Zherebtsova's War and Peace]," *Vedomosti*, October 12, 2019, https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2019/12/10/818371-voina-zherebtsovoi.
[243] Ostap Karmodi, "Interv'yu s Polinoy ZHerebtsovoy. Polnaya Versiya [Interview with Polina Zherebtsova. Full Version]," *Medium*, October 23, 2017, https://medium.com/@karmodi/polina-45th-f696871ebc64. This is the full version of Polina's interview on Radio Svoboda Ostap Karmodi, "Sistema Unizheniya [Sytem of Humilitation]," *Radio Svoboda*, October 10, 2017, https://www.svoboda.org/a/28777974.html.
[244] neihimoon, "DOKTOR SHTAMOV NANOSIT OTVETNYY UDAR " [DOCTOR SHTAMOV DELIVERS A RESPONSE], Polina Zherebtsova's Journal: Articles, Lectures, Books, Interviews (blog), June 4, 2014, https://neihimoon.livejournal.com/141592.html?thread=1015832#t1015832.

by the government –their phone logs were not accessible.[245] Whereas in the diary, she portrayed herself as a victim to the war and devoted little concern on the government, in the publication process she considered that the power figures were hindering her publication process. Her deep attachment to the Chechen land in the diary has also replaced in recent interviews by an engrossment with Finnish nature and civilization.[246]

3.3. Shifts in the author's intent- from witnessing to making political claims

Zherebtsova's attitude regarding her own political position has, even according to herself, changed with time. In an interview with a French newspaper, she asserted that she started writing as a witness who did not "take sides." Her first motivation was to "document the events with as much precision as possible." She mentioned her attachment to documenting something as innocuous as the weather as there were no weather reports in Chechnya during the war.[247] With time, her commitment to document the war and unearth civilian stories has furthered. She notably collects testimonies from other people as a personal project.[248]

Today, she expresses ambitious political goals and does not hide her contempt for the current state of Russian and Chechen politics. Whereas her references to political figures in the book are vague and peripheral, she dedicated her 1999-2002 diary to the "Leaders of today's Russia."[249] In 2011, she filed a lawsuit in the Moscow Tribunal against the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance, claiming compensation for the toll that the war took on her health. These procedures are slow, but she repeatedly admitted in interviews that she is suing the Russian government because she cannot sue on the international level without exhausting national legal channels first. Her end goal is to sue in the European Court of Human Rights.

[245] Laurent David Sanama, "Polina Jerebtsova : 'Ca ne suffit pas que Poutine parte !'" [Polina Zherebtsova: "It's not enough that Putin leaves!], *Les Inrocks*, October 12, 2013, https://www.lesinrocks.com/2013/10/12/actualite/actualite/polina-jerebtsova-ca-suffit-pas-poutine-parte/.
[246] Sanama, "Polina Jerebtsova : 'Ca ne suffit pas que Poutine parte !'.
[247] Karen Lajon, "Polina Jerebtsova, une adolescence au cœur de la guerre," [Polina Jerebtsova, adolescence at the heart of war] *Le Journal du Dimanche*, September 26, 2013, https://www.lejdd.fr/International/Polina-Jerebtsova-une-adolescence-au-coeur-de-la-guerre-631028.
[248] Sanama, "Polina Jerebtsova : 'Ca ne suffit pas que Poutine parte !'.
[249] Zherebtsova, *Le journal de Polina Jerebtsova*.

She intends to sue the Russian government into recognizing the shelling of the market in October 1999.[250]

However, her most striking claim was to argue that the Russian state waged a "genocide" against the people of Chechnya, regardless of ethnicity, and that she aims to obtain justice in the ECHR.[251] With this wording, she strongly refuted the idea of an ethnically-based genocide against Chechens. Instead, she cited the inflated figure of 70% of ethnic Russians in Grozny to argue that the Moscow aimed not to destroy the Chechen people, but the entire multi-ethnic population of an otherwise peaceful Republic.

The idea of a genocide in 1990s Chechnya had emerged as the events were ongoing. A group of 250 NGOs led by Memorial asserted in 2001 that Russia was committing a genocide against the Chechen population.[252] Around the same time, Russian officials spoke of "mass murder of ethnic Russians" in Maskhadov's Chechnya at the Council of Europe.[253]

When asked whether she thought the "anti-Russian" violence she suffered was justified, Zherebtsova answered that violence had been coopted by both sides for political gain. According to Zherebtsova the Russian nationalists purposely denounced ethnic cleansing in post-1991 Chechnya in order to legitimize a Russian intervention. She refutes their timeline, arguing that Chechen nationalists only began exercising widespread ethnic violence starting in mid-1995. She describes post 1995 violence against non-Chechen and non-Ingush ethnic groups as "no longer just nationalism – militant fascism."[254] In contrast, she attributes the violence that took place in the early 1990s to the general chaos of the era: "There was banditry

250 Karmodi, "Sistema Unizheniya [Humilitation System]."
251 Ostap Karmodi, "Ya Prishla, Chtoby Stat' Svidetelem. [I Came to Witness]," *Radio Svoboda*, August 29, 2019, https://www.svoboda.org/a/27212447.html.
252 Council of Europe and Council of Europe Staff, *Yearbook of the European Convention on Human Rights, 2001/Annuaire De LA Convention Europenne Des Droits De L'Homme* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2002), 320.
253 Jamestown Foundation, "CHECHENS CHARGED WITH THE 'GENOCIDE' OF ETHNIC RUSSIANS.," accessed May 15, 2020, https://jamestown.org/program/chechens-charged-with-the-genocide-of-ethnic-russians-2/.
254 "Ya Na Storone Tekh, Kto Ne Umeyet Strelyat' [I'm on the Side of Those Who Can't Shoot]," *Novaya Gazeta*, March 29, 2019, http://novayagazeta.spb.ru/articles/10249/.

but it was the dashing nineties, the collapse of the USSR, everywhere they killed defenseless people, pensioners, seized apartments regardless of nationality. On the contrary, in the first war, people of *all nationalities* hid together in the basements, helping each other survive [my emphasis]."[255] Here, she surprisingly echoes the Russian regime's rhetoric about the 1990s as a time of chaos in order to make a point about the first Russian intervention being unnecessary.[256]

This account of interethnic solidarity being only a feature of the first war is not completely consistent with the diary itself. Indeed, in the Second War diary, there are moments when civilians from different ethnicities help each other with food and shelter.[257] In interviews, she described extreme phenomena in the period leading up to the second war, such as children being indoctrinated to strive to kill Russians, and only surviving thanks to her personal connection to a Chechen step-father.[258] Her comments over anti-Russian sentiment in 1995-6 and over Grozny as a martyr city seem to strongly point towards the double-victimhood of Russians in Chechnya, as victims of the prewar and wartime persecution, and as invisible victims of what was called the "genocide" against ethnic Chechens. Once again, this does not quite square with her diary, where she described the targeting of Chechen men in cleansing operations, and never mentioned a genocide against people with Russian names, although she extensively described anti-Russian sentiments and the victimhood of the Chechen Republic.

3.4. Russian reception

3.4.1. Inauthenticity, Russophobia

Upon publication, nationalists from Russia and Chechnya accused the diary of being a fabrication, inherently "anti-Russian" or "anti-Chechen" respectively.[259] The form of these

[255] "Ya Na Storone Tekh, Kto Ne Umeyet Strelyat' [I'm on the Side of Those Who Can't Shoot]."
[256] Malinova, "Framing the Collective Memory of the 1990s as a Legitimation Tool for Putin's Regime," 7-8.
[257] Multiple Chechens helped her survive, see Zherebtsova, *Le Journal de Polina Jerebtsova*, 76, 196.
[258] "Ya Na Storone Tekh, Kto Ne Umeyet Strelyat' [I'm on the Side of Those Who Can't Shoot]."
[259] "Ya Na Storone Tekh, Kto Ne Umeyet Strelyat' [I'm on the Side of Those Who Can't Shoot]

criticisms, and threats, were mainly comments on her blogs, individuals reviewing the book on bookstore webpages, as well as people reaching out to her privately.

The outcry against the diary as a fabricated work should bring our attention to the assumed political intent behind it. The diary has been accused of putting forward an agenda of "Russophobia." The claim to Russophobia should not necessarily come as a surprise —Polina frequently distances herself from her Russian roots, while painting the crimes of Russian soldiers. The fear that someone would gain cultural and economic capital from being anti-Russian is a commonly used trope by Russian nationalists. The term "Russophobia" was coined in the 19th century, and in the international context referred to the Western assumption that Russian foreign policy as unredeemable evil, shadowy, expansionist, combined with the mischaracterization of Russian power as consistently and teleologically dictatorial.[260] In the 1980s, in the Soviet Union, the term was effectively popularized by the mathematician and nationalist thinker Igor Shafarevich who argued that Jewish intellectuals aimed to destroy the Russian nation.[261] The term, with its anti-Semitic conspiratorial implications, has been abused by Putin's administration: criticism of Russian policy has widely been dismissed as "Russophobia."[262] Commenters argued that Zherebtsova's diary is part of a broader pattern of fake testimonies, designed to vilify Russia at home and abroad; therein echoing the conspiratorial aspects of their worldview.

The claim that a controversial document is a fabrication by both sides of a dispute — here, Chechen and Russian— is not an unprecedented event. Anonyma's *Women in Berlin* concentrated on the mass-scale rapes of German woman by Red Army soldiers. When it was first published, it outraged those who saw it as a defamatory and salacious ploy against German

[260] Anatol Lieven, "Against Russophobia," *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 4 (2000): 25.
[261] I. R. Shafarevich, *Rusofobiia*, Noveishaya Istoriya Rossii (Moscow: ĖKSMO : Algoritm, 2005).
[262] Brian Whitmore, "The 'Russophobia' Weapon," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, May 9, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/the-russophobia-weapon/28476678.html.

women.[263] It also sparked outcry from thinkers sympathetic to the Soviet cause, who argued that it had been fabricated to slander the Soviet Union. It was accused of portraying Germany as the victim of the war, instead of the perpetrator, by appealing to basic empathy for a victim of such brutal actions.[264] Discrediting the witness as an enemy strawman works hand-in-hand with the idea that their account is a fabrication.

3.4.2 Inauthenticity as a way to appear Western – The Shtamov controversy

State-affiliated media the did not call her a Russophobe, but it reported on the fact that she had been criticized by former prosecutor Yuri Shtamov.[265] In 2013, two years after the first publication of the diary, the Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky declared that he was "ready to fight for the preservation of the North Caucasus as part of Russia by any means necessary," because the North Caucasus was Russian land. Zherebtsova wrote an open letter denouncing this declaration, writing that this was unacceptable on behalf of victims of the war. The letter made the parallel between the double standards for oligarchs and civilians living under war conditions and ended with an expression of shame over having Russian citizenship.[266] The letter soon gained attention from several media outlets, before being classified as "extremist material" in 2015 and therefore declared illegal content in Russian outlets.[267]

Following the open letter, in December 2013, former prosecutor Yuri Shtamov wrote a post on his "*Echo of Moscow*" blog in which he questioned Zheretbsova's honesty. He phrased

263 Miriam Gebhardt, *Crimes Unspoken : The Rape of German Women*, Chapter 5, Section "Anonymous and the Censorship of Memory"
264 Miriam Gebhardt, *Crimes Unspoken : The Rape of German Women*, Chapter 5, Section "Anonymous and the Censorship of Memory"
265 Svetlana Povoraznyuk, "Prokuratura Proverit «Ekho Moskvy» Na Razzhiganiye Mezhnatsional'noy Rozni [The Prosecutor's Office Will Check 'Echo of Moscow' over Incitation to Ethnic Hatred]," *Izvestiya,* June 2, 2014, https://iz.ru/news/571773.
266 Polina Zherebtsova, "Letter to Mikhail Khodorkovsky," Grani.ru, December 24, 2013, https://graniru.org/blogs/free/entries/222757.html.
267 "Russia's MoJ Puts Zherebtsova's Letter to Khodorkovsky on List of Extremist Materials," *Caucasian Knot,* August 7, 2015, http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/32281/.

the hypothesis that Zherebtsova had lied on her life in order to obtain refugee status and foreign citizenship in Finland. On her *Echo of Moscow blo*g, Zherebtsova answered in an article entitled "Who are you, Dr. Shtamov?" where she linked Shtamov's alleged hostility towards North Caucasians to his family origins in Stavropol.[268] Stavropol inhabitants were, according to her, always widely prejudiced against North Caucasian refugees. After the 2014 publication of Zherebtsova's diary, Shtamov sued the *Echo of Moscow* for featuring Zheretbtsova's response, which he accused of incitation to ethnic hatred. The story was taken up by state-affiliated media such as *Izvestiya*, which she identified as a smear campaign.[269]

The accusation of Russophobia and Chechen-phobia rely on the idea that the agenda behind an author's career will advance the interests of the enemy side. Here, in Shtamov's thinking, the account was fabricated so that the defector can join the enemy—namely, Polina had fabricated her story in order to get access to Western privileges. While he was not accusing her of Russophobia directly, there is an implicit accusation that as someone who wanted to join forces with the West, she had to invent a story of victimhood at the hand of Russians.

3.4.3.Co-opting Zherebtsova from the official Russian angle

Crucially, state-level officials in Russia or in Chechnya did not, to the extent of my knowledge, denounce it as a Russophobic fabrication. On the contrary, the review of Polina's diary in the official *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* praised Polina's candid depiction of interethnic fighting. It even mentioned the "poorly thought out actions of the Russian forces which caused the civilian population to suffer," in addition to the harassment of Russian by Chechens.[270] The officially sanctioned approach to the diary adopts in this instance a conciliatory tone, citing the

[268] The title refers to the French spy movie "Who are you Mr. Sorge?" She is hinting at Shtamov being affiliated with the Russian secret service.
[269] Povoraznyuk, "Prokuratura Proverit «Ekho Moskvy» Na Razzhiganiye Mezhnatsional'noy Rozni [The Prosecutor's Office Will Check 'Echo of Moscow' over Incitation to Ethnic Hatred]"; neihimoon, "DOCTOR SHTAMOV DELIVERS A RESPONSE," *Journal of Polina Zherebtsova: Articles, Lectures, Books, Interviews.* (blog), June 4, 2014, https://neihimoon.livejournal.com/141592.html.
[270] Masha Belova, "'Dnevnik Poliny Zherebtsovoy' [Polina Zherebtsova's Diary]," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, October 24, 2011, https://rg.ru/2011/10/24/kniga-site.html.

lack of knowledge over the "bleeding wounds" left in Chechnya. It presents the diary as "telling the truth" about the war in a portrayal of Zherebtsova suffering "a genocide from two sides."[271] Therefore, Polina's testimony was accepted in the official history as a story of victimhood: Polina's character is deprived of her agency—she is a victim on two accounts, being Russian and living under war. This deprivation of Polina's agency does not correspond to her own articulation in the diary. As we saw in the previous chapter, her self-articulation was not reduced to victim of the war, but mainly of a crucial historical witness to the horrors that kept happening after the official taking of Grozny.

The focus on Polina's victimhood, and silence over her agency fits into the Russian discourse of the second war as a necessary reparation of the first's mistakes. Although it forces acknowledgement of errors on behalf of the Russian soldiers, it also promotes the idea that Chechnya was a war-torn region once the "old world" (presumably the Soviet Union) collapsed, which necessitated an intervention. However, the account in *Rossiskaya Gazeta* is interesting in its characterizations of an ongoing "interethnic struggle" and "bleeding wounds left unresolved" in the Chechen Republic. Namely, "anti-Russian sentiments" and "anti-Chechen" sentiments and the lack of current knowledge about the war preoccupy the author. In the official Russian version, Polina's historical narrative is therefore fitting in the existing idea of necessary Russian intervention, but permits to raise awareness to remaining issues in Chechnya, like ongoing ethnic prejudice.

The review of the diary in *Moskovskie Novosti*, unlike in *Rossiskaya Gazeta* depicted Polina as a crucial witness who wrote badly, rather than a victim. [272] The review is harsh but

[271] Belova.

[272] Since its inception in the perestroika, Moskovskie Novosti had been catering to the more liberal and educated segments of Moscow society. When the diary was published in 2011, *Moskovskie Novosti* was a newspaper in a hybrid position, neither a government mouthpiece nor a really independent newspaper. It had just been relaunched by an editor in chief who encouraged reporters to be critical, balanced, and objective, although the paper was owned by RIA Novosti, the government press agency. See Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2009) 114-115. Elena Rybakova, "Neprochitanie Chechnii," *Moskovskie Novosti*, November 18, 2011, https://www.mn.ru/friday/75700.

thorough, putting into light her articulation of morality, its relation to basic needs like food, relations with neighbors and family, its cohabitation of Russian and Islamic references. The main purpose of the review seems to show that the diary is an uncomfortable read, yet a necessary one. Its uncomfortable quality does not only have to do with Polina's bad grammar or direct portrayal of crass matters. The review appeared before the controversies but predicted that the diary would force Russia to start an uncomfortable conversation over the war. While there is "no language" for such a conversation, Polina, by being an imperfect victim in front of imperfect perpetrators, inevitably provokes a reaction.

As we can see, the higher-end official and officially-sponsored media reacted to the diary as an unprecedented occasion for the Russian public to confront the uncomfortable legacy of the war. In that manner, the diary set a historical precedent. The way in which the diary was incorporated into the state cannon, however, differed depending on the publication. This took place at the level of literary criticism. On the other hand, more basic state channels like *Izvestiya* only reported on the feud between Shtamov and Zherebtsova.

3.4.5.Polina as a champion of opposition newspapers

Throughout the controversies, the independent press has amplified Zherebtova's voice—mainly in the columns *of Novaya Gazeta*, *Ekho Moskvy*, and *Radio Svoboda.* Unlike with the official outlets, Polina gave interviews –sometimes extraordinary long ones—to these papers in which she spoke of what mattered to her: her goals when writing, troubles with publishing, controversy with Khodorkovsky and Shtamov and her admiration for Finland. She notably refuted the characterization of the war as waged against ethnic Chechens, saying "To me it is blasphemous to say that one nation suffered. Bombs and bullets do not ask for

nationality. It is right to say, that "all inhabitants of a multinational republic" suffered, and nothing else."[273]

Accordingly, these articles gave an account closest to Polina's writings and testimonies, since they are mostly written or spoken by her. They emphasize the diarist's crucial agency in memorializing the war and her hardships in bringing her story to light. As they are basically written in her words, she appears as a victim of state violence beyond the scope of war, through the persecution and harassment in the 2010s. *Novaya Gazeta* reported on the follow-up to the diary's publications: the theater plays that displayed it, as well as those who refused to show it.[274]

The opposition news and Zherebtsova therefore willingly collaborated to incorporate her version in their narrative of the Chechen wars. Polina, as an eyewitness to the wars, is one of the voices that they strive to unearth, and whose testimony was hindered along the way. In their accounts, these articles do not devote much time to the responsibility of Putin personally, but rather blame the widespread censorship over the issue. This narrative is in accord with what Politkovskaya was already doing years ago in her investigative reporting for *Novaya Gazeta*: telling a complicated story by bringing numerous voices to the forefront and addressing the failures of multiple sides.

[273] "Prestuplenija Ne Prostit', Polina Zherebtsova - k 25 Leti Vojny.[Crimes can not be forgiven, Polina Zherebtsova - to the 25th anniversary of the war]," *Radio Svoboda*, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.svoboda.org/a/30316105.html.

[274] "Moskovskiy teatr «Praktika» otkazalsya ot postanovok po dnevnikam urozhenki Groznogo Poliny ZHerebtsovoy, kotoraya v svoikh dnevnikakh zafiksirovala sobytiya pervoy i vtoroy voyny v CHechne. [Moscow Praktika Theater refused to make productions based on the diaries of a native of Grozny, Polina Zherebtsova, who recorded in her diaries the events of the first and second war in Chechnya]," *Novaya Gazeta*, January 24, 2015, Московский театр «Практика» отказался от постановок по дневникам уроженки Грозного Полины Жеребцовой, которая в своих дневниках зафиксировала события первой и второй войны в Чечне.

3.5. Chechen context

3.5.1. Chechen war memorialization

According to the scholars of the region, the policy of Russian silence over the Chechen conflict provides opportunities by regional authorities in order to extend their personal political influence over the Republic in the "revenge of the Caucasus."[275] While this silence may be exploited by individuals in order to gain political power, the people of the Caucasus have virtually no memorialization of the wars available publicly. The wars having taken place in the past fifteen to thirty years, the trauma of it, rather than its memory, lives in the Chechen population, both at home and abroad. Because of Moscow's refusal to admit acts of war, preserving the memory of the war is left to localized efforts to collect testimonies from survivors, reports by NGOs, photographs and films—as well as personal enterprises like Zherebtsova's.[276]

While the obliteration of Grozny and the hundreds of thousands of dead civilians are not commemorated, the city has been rebuilt with Emirate-style luxury skyscrapers. In the city, public war commemoration focuses on the Russian soldiers who lost their lives, as opposed to the locals.[277] Various policies of replacing Chechen landmarks with homages to Russian history show a willingness to demobilize the memory of Chechen suffering at the hands of the Soviet and Russian state, which had been so significant in the formation of independentist ideologies. Remembrance of pro-independence figures –those who have not accepted to pledge allegiance to Kadyrov—is unthinkable in the public space.[278]

[275] Danilova, "Victims and Heroes: Commemorating the Russian Military Casualties in the Chechen Conflict."
[276] Anne Le Huérou and Amandine Regamey, "Massacres of Civilians in Chechnya | Sciences Po Mass Violence and Resistance - Research Network," Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, Sciencespo.fr, March 9, 2015, https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/massacres-civilians-chechnya.html#title8.
[277] Le Huérou and Regamey, sec. "Memory."
[278] Le Huérou and Regamey.

Nevertheless, the Chechen president has stressed the need to hold Russian forces accountable for crimes committed in 1999-2000.[279] Kadyrov is a leader who was never elected and who maintains an authoritarian grip over the population, and therefore could make use of an occasion to project legitimacy. The effort to maintain some degree of criticism towards Moscow could be a way to entrench his position as the voice of the Chechen people. Additionally, this strategy establishes a separation between his current regime and the events happening at the beginning of the second war.[280] In Kadyrov's interests, abuses perpetuated by the Russian army and the Chechen militia in 1999-2000 need to be perceived as separate from the actions carried out by his men since he took over in 2006, which he calls a "war against thousands of international terrorists from different parts of the world."[281] Through this reference to a war against international terrorism, Kadyrov is echoing Putin's framing of the second Chechen war as a "counter-terrorist operations" against enemies from inside and abroad.[282] Furthermore, when the United States waged war in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Putin's Chechen intervention fused into the international campaign against radical Islamist terrorism. This rhetoric is perpetuated now by Kadyrov, in reference to his own takeover in 2006, which he separates from Russian-imposed violence in 1999-2000.

This situation leaves few real-life occasions to commemorate the violence and the destruction that characterized the second war in Chechnya. On the other hand, the Internet provides a privileged space for assembling a memory of the war beyond official discourses.. Several social media platforms host online groups where people who used to live in Grozny or still do meet and remember their city.[283] Walter Sperling, an anthropologist of both real and

279 Le Huérou and Regamey, sec. "Memory."
280 Le Huérou and Regamey, sec. "Memory."
281 Bataeva, Khata, "Protiv Terrora! [Against Terror!]," *Vesti Respubliki*, accessed June 3, 2020, http://vesti95.ru/2016/06/protiv-terrora/.
282 Russell, *Chechnya*, x.
283 Walter Sperling, "Grozny at It Was before the War: Rememberance and Reconciliation in 'Virtual' and 'Real' Post-Soviet Communities," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou et al. (Routledge, 2014).

online spaces, found that many people from these groups, as well as in Grozny, entertain a fond memory of Soviet-era Grozny as an "international" city.[284] The memory of the city as it used to be relies on the ideology of a "family of peoples" enforced in the Soviet Union since Stalin.[285]

This longing for a multicultural Soviet past in virtual and real spaces diverges from the current official discourse proposed by the nationalists on either side. Informed by the experience of war, they challenge the tropes of Russian colonizers and Chechen primitive highlanders.[286] This Soviet rhetoric of a family of nations echoes to Zherebtsova's portrayal of peace in pre-1994 Grozny, both in the diary and in her subsequent publication of it. While the claim of a golden era of interethnic peace is exaggerated, it is not unique. It resonates with the Soviet-era descriptions of Grozny shared by online communities of former Grozny inhabitants, which memorialize the city as it was before the war on Internet communities.[287]

3.5.2. Reading the Diary in Chechnya

Several Chechen-centric online media provide an active memorialization of the war. They are all based outside of Chechnya, for security reasons. *Kavkazkii Uzel*, (*Caucasian Knot*) focuses on documenting and remembering human rights abuses in the wars and in modern-day Northern Caucasus. The Salafi news website Kavkaz Center celebrates figures like the warlord Shamil Basaev, who organized the Beslan hostage taking. They also published tributes that call the "Chechen Jihad" a "very successful one." [288] The website is banned in Russia. The Western-based Radio Free Europe – Chechnya also covered the war and provided an extensive coverage

[284] Sperling.
[285] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire,* 431.
[286] Sperling.
[287] Sperling.
[288] "SHeykh Abu Katada al'-Filistini: CHechenskiy dzhikhad - velikiy dzhikhad, v kotorom Allakh vozvysil muzhchin i dal im sokrushit' Rossiyu," [Sheikh Abu Qatada al'-Filistina: Chechen jihad is a great jihad in which Allah exalted men and allowed them to crush' Russia], *Kavkazcenter.com*, March 19, 2020, https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2020/03/19/118856/shejkh-abu-katada-al-filistini-chechenskij-dzhikhad---velikij-dzhikhad-v-kotorom-allakh-vozvysil-muzhchin-i-dal-im-sokrushit-rossiyu.shtml.

of Chechen politics. [289] All the aforementioned media organs featured articles on Polina Zherebtsova's diary. Although Zherebtsova received threats and insults from Wahhabis and Chechen nationalists, the accessible press articles are all positive, and claiming the diary as an example of Chechen victimhood.

Caucasian Knot specializes in reporting from human rights activists from the region.-- is therefore an alternative and oppositional outlet.[290] It systematically covered the publication and controversy around the diary, framing Zherebtsova as a credible source being unfairly attacked. The bulk of their reviews focused on human rights activists who defend the diary's value as an authentic text piece of evidence.[291] This stands in sharp contrast to the Russian opposition press, which mostly published long interviews with Zherebtsova. To a lesser extent, *Caucasian Knot* articles pick anecdotes from Zherebtsova's diary, underlining her suffering and the crucial role of interethnic solidarity in her survival.[292] Beyond the facts, their publications amplify the voices of human rights activists from Moscow, in the idea that the wars in Chechnya had implications on Russian morality.[293]

The story put forward by *Caucasian Knot* is one told by human rights activists, where Zherebtsova fits perfectly as a victim to the war, and to the censorship that came afterwards. Her agency as a diarist does not feature prominently. Instead, the diary is valuable as a source of insights into the factual events of the war –like the details of the market bombing, which is an important issue to the publication. *Caucasian Knot* preserves the memory of the market

[289] Kit Condill, "The Online Media Environment of the North Caucasus: Issues of Preservation and Accessibility in a Zone of Political and Ideological Conflict," *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture* 45, no. 4 (February 3, 2017): 166–76.
[290] Condill, 170.
[291] "V Moskve Predstavlena Unikal'naya Kniga Dnevnikovykh Zapisey Ochevidtsa Voyny v Chechne [In Moscow, the Presentation of a Unique Diary of an Eyewitness to the War in Chechnya]."
[292] "Avtor Knigi o Voyne v Chechne Polina Zherebtsova Poprosila Politubezhishcha v Finlyandii [Polina Zherebtsova, Author of a Book on the War in Chechnya, Seeks Political Asylum in Finland]," *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, January 25, 2012, https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/199878/.
[293] Polina Zherebtsova, author of a book on the war in Chechnya, seeks political asylum in Finland

bombing by collecting testimonies and aims to get Russia to recognize it.[294] In the same vein, this source focuses on Zherebtsova's harassment by state officials, because it denotes an abuse of human rights.

In a radically different perspective, the Salafist-leaning news source Kavkaz Center also followed the harassment of Zherebtsova after publication and her move to Finland. Never using direct interviews, but rather obtaining information from the "newspaper of Chekist crooks and thieves *Kommersant,"* they reported on her comparison between Chechnya and Ukraine in 2015.[295] These reports lump together the two cases as a way to demonstrates Russia's evil. The fact that Zherebtsova is not ethnically Chechen, or well-inclined towards Salafis, does not seem to represent an issue for the publication. Kavkaz Center uses Zherebtsova's testimony of childhood victimhood to demonstrate the illegitimacy of Russian intervention and of the current Chechen leadership. Using the name "Dzhokhar" to refer to Grozny they posted Zherebtsova's claim that the current Chechen capital was built on blood. Polina also fits their narrative as someone who opposed the Russian regime and fled the country under political persecution from "Putin and Kadyrov gangs."[296] Her story as a victim, in this account, demonstrates the evil of Russian and current Chechen leadership—who remained the ultimate enemies since the war.

[294] "Voyennaya Prokuratura Ne Priznala Fakta Raketnogo Obstrela Stolitsy CHechni v 1999 Godu [The Military Prosecutor's Office Did Not Recognize the Fact of a Rocket Attack on the Capital of Chechnya in 1999]," *Kavkaky Uzel*, accessed June 16, 2020, https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/116749/.
[295] "RUSIZM. Zverstva russkikh v Ukraine - povtoreniye ikh zverstv v CHechne [RUSISM. Russian atrocities in Ukraine - repetition of their atrocities in Chechnya]," *Kavkazcenter.com*, February 25, 2015, https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2015/02/25/108175/rusizm--zverstva-russkikh-v-ukraine---povtorenie-ikh-zverstv-v-chechne.shtml.
[296] "Russkaya Pisatel'nitsa Iz Chechni Poprosila v Finlyandii Politicheskoye Ubezhishche Ot Band Kadyrova i Putina [Russian Writer from Chechnya Seeks Political Asylum in Finland from Gangs of Kadyrov and Putin]," *Kavkazcenter.Com*, January 23, 2012, https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2012/01/23/88355/russkij-put--russkaya-pisatelnitsa-iz-chechni-poprosila-v-finlyandii-politicheskoe-ubezhische-ot-band-kadyrova-i-putina.shtml.

3.6. Western Context

3.6.1. Western Memorialization

The Chechen wars were followed in Western press, although they were not a focal point of political discourse to the same extent as, for example, Kosovo. In the first Chechen war, Western commenters tended to characterize the Chechen independentists as "freedom fighters," emphasizing the romantic figure of the Chechen who resisted against the might of the former largest army in the world. On the other hand, by the second war, the Russian rhetoric of an interior matter and the need to fight global extremist terrorism was largely accepted.[297] This acceptation of the Russian narrative was even more hegemonic after 9/11, when the West took the vanguard of the war against international terrorism.[298] The French press has often reported on human rights abuses in the period, and a French war correspondent went to Chechnya to document the events. [299] The American press also followed the reports by Anna Politkovskaya.

On French selling platforms, the official description of the diary, given by the editor, contains a reference to Anne Frank.[300] In these numerous comparisons with Anne Frank, the Western press and publishing houses invoke the ultimate reference for a child's suffering under a war. This reference places a foreign diary into the frames of Holocaust references, and places it in a closer cultural and memorial context to France. It also has a commercial aspect: Anne Frank's immense commercial success means that references to her sell. Her invocation becomes a memory trope, mobilizes the audience for commercial and emotional purposes. Comparison seems to palliate for the lack of domestic knowledge over the Chechen war, whereas it does not necessarily add any understanding over Polina's situation.

[297] Russell, *Chechnya,* 53-70.
[298] Russell, *Chechnya,* 53-70.
[299] Anne Nivat was a correspondent for two major French newspapers, which raised awareness on the awful condition of civilians and gross violations of human rights by all parties. She furthered her narration in a book on her experience in the combat zone.
[300] "Polina JEREBTSOVA : sa biographie, son actualité, ses livres," Lisez!, accessed January 25, 2020.

3.6.2 Western reception

In 2013, when the diary was translated and published in France, Polina gave a press tour in France. She usually mentioned similar topics in every interview, namely the crucial role of the diary in her mental survival, her multinational background, the ethnic peace that existed in Chechnya before the wars, the fact that the war destroyed the entire people of Chechnya, not just the Chechens.[301] The interethnic peace formula was emphasized as a moment of "peaceful" life with "mixed marriages" and religious festivities of all kinds being celebrated.

In newspapers, the diary is often compared with Anne Frank's.[302] At times, this comparison was underlined by a lyrical style to emphasize victimhood: "A book of the magnitude of *Anne Franck's Diary*[sic], a book written amidst war, blood, and tears, in misery and craze."[303] Beyond her victimhood, the French press also underlines Polina's determination in recording history under war.

The French press tended to direct the interviews towards the personal role of Vladimir Putin in the war and in Zherebtsova's hardships. Unlike the Russian press, questions in the French press inquire about Russian president's personal responsibility in the war and in the attacks against Polina. The *Journal du Dimanche* portrayed Polina as "an enemy from the inside, inacceptable for Putin's government."[304]

Confronted with these direct questions, Polina attacked Vladimir Putin frontally in the Western media. She reminded her western audience that he did nothing to evacuate the civil

301 Marc Perelman, "L'Entretien - Polina Jerebtsova, auteur du 'Journal de Polina : une adolescence tchétchène' [The Interview - Polina Jerebtsova, author of 'Polina's Diary: a Chechen adolescence']," *France 24*, September 26, 2013, https://www.france24.com/fr/20130926-lentretien-polina-jerebtsova-auteur-le-journal-de-polina-une-adolescence-tchetchene.
302 Perelman; "Le Journal de Polina," Radio France, accessed June 4, 2020, https://www.radiofrance.fr/les-editions/livres/le-journal-de-polina; Armin Arefi, "'Le journal de Polina' : la guerre de Tchétchénie avec des yeux d'enfant," *Le Point*, October 4, 2013, https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/le-journal-de-polina-la-guerre-en-tchetchenie-avec-des-yeux-d-enfant-04-10-2013-1739112_24.php.
303 Karen Lajon, "Polina Jerebtsova, une adolescence au cœur de la guerre," *Le Journal du Dimanche*, September 26, 2013, https://www.lejdd.fr/International/Polina-Jerebtsova-une-adolescence-au-coeur-de-la-guerre-631028.
304 Lajon.

population and calls him a "man who committed many mistakes."[305] In another article, she wrote "Although I belong to different cultures, because of this war and what Putin imposes on the people who only ask for democracy, I have come to the point where I am ashamed of being Russian."[306] For her, Russia beyond Putin is a "sick" country and that "it is not enough to have Putin leave" because many other "crooks, thieves, and rapists are in power there!"[307]

The Western press picked up on Polina's self-characterization as a victim to the authoritarian Putin regime, and compared her to Anne Frank solely because of their similar age. The French press was also a space which let Zherebtsova discuss her idea of a "genocide of the population who lived in Chechnya."[308]

In creating a history of the Chechen war, the French framing focused on the political situation in Russia and on the hardships of the author. This was facilitated by the long format of the interviews, which enabled Zherebtsova's denunciations of Russian power and her siding with "the West" instead of Russia. On the other hand, the comparisons with Anne Frank which raise Polina to the position of a relatable, victimized child, were uncalled for by the author. The history that these accounts give of the Chechen wars is however close to her text, with numerous references to her material conditions, self-preservation in writing, religious concerns.

3.7. Conclusion

Most press reviews of the diary were sympathetic to Polina, and took her diary as an authentic source of a child victim of war. However, different interests meant that the diary had completely different meanings in the memorialization of the war, although it was always part

305 Perelman, “L’Entretien - Polina Jerebtsova, auteur du "Journal de Polina.”
306 Louise Bonte, “Tchétchénie: témoignage d’une adolescence sous les bombes,” *LExpress.fr*, September 28, 2013, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/europe/tchetchenie-temoignage-d-une-adolescence-sous-les-bombes_1286003.html.
307 Sanama, “Polina Jerebtsova.”
308 Perelman, “L’Entretien - Polina Jerebtsova, auteur du "Journal de Polina.”

of it. In the Russian official discourse, the diary was taken as a gruesome testimony to victimhood, which begged Russia to confront its responsibility in the Caucasus wars. Polina's narrative of being targeted by Chechens civilians as a Russian is emphasized.

In the opposition press, it was seen as the logical continuation of opposition investigative work: the diary portrays the chaos and the horror of the Chechen conflict on all sides. Polina features regularly in the columns of *Novaya Gazeta* and *Radio Svoboda*, and she gave several interviews in which her new political goals —pursuing Russia in the ECHR for genocide against the inhabitants of Chechnya and to recognize the bombing of the market— are detailed. The Chechen independent press took it as a further piece of evidence of human rights abuses, and the Salafi press co-opted her story as a proof of the intrinsic corruption of Russia.

The French reaction was less politically charged because of the more or less pronounced ignorant background, as opposed to taboo, on the Chechen topic, and it also welcomed Polina's account as one of victimhood. The known references —Putin, Solzhenitsin, Politkovskaya— were emphasized and made for an account that is not always nuanced: Putin was generally designated responsible for the war and the persecution encountered by the author.

Part 4: Conclusion

Polina Zherebtsova's diary made us confront the historical narration of the Chechen wars, both via her text and through the controversy that followed the publication of her diary. Theorists of the diary posited that it could be used as a source to understand self-construction in a historical context, and therefore provide confirmation or subversion of existing historical narratives, and interrogate the agency of historical actors.[309] The analysis of Polina's text demonstrated that the war provoked a profound rupture in her self-understanding. Diary-writing as a historical practice in her case was deeply rooted in the crisis. Warfare caused hunger, and therefore diminished her capacity for agency. It forced her to be solely concerned with survival, and physically took away her possibility to thrive in imagining the future as a woman —it made her look older, broke her body and her spirit. At the same time, war cemented a purpose for Polina. By taking all future prospects as a woman away, it forced her to envision herself as a witness of the war. There we can see Polina's agency in the process: she absorbed the narrative of the war as all encompassing, and created a new perspective for herself out of it.

Witnessing the war allowed writing to become a professional perspective. Her personal diary, as a record of history, became her way to get out of the crisis of bombings, hunger, and harassment. This meant that the diary also served as a moralistic tool to settle personal scores, which she included in her vision of the history of Second War Grozny —a place so morally awful that its exposure to the world would, according to her, show that men should not resort to violence.

Through her adolescent account which forms moral judgement, we can observe the ongoing collapse of moral values in Post-Soviet, post-independence Chechnya. She opposed this collapse, characterized by ethnic strife, widespread looting, and sexual promiscuity, to an

[309] Maynes et al., *Telling Stories,* 44-45.

idealized version of an "interethnic," peaceful Chechnya before the 1994, wrapped in the language of "The Friendship of the Peoples."[310] When the diary started, the Republic of Chechnya, had been influenced by, anti-Russian, Chechen nationalistic and increasingly jihadist, discourse for eight years, after seven decades of Soviet-imposed "Friendship of the Nations." Throughout the diary, anyone not presenting as Chechen was persecuted– adopting a Chechen name, a headscarf, speaking Chechen in everyday life appeared as matters of survival. And yet, Polina articulated a discourse of ethnic fluidity, where she deliberately chose to take part in some aspects of Islamic tradition, therefore taking a Soviet-style approach of "culturedness" in response to the ethnic uniformization of Grozny.

Throughout the entries, the diary demonstrated shifting gender norms in the Chechen Republic. As the war progressed, Polina felt increasingly alienated from her Chechen counterparts, most of whom decided to get married as teenagers. The war made many young women turn towards traditionalized gender roles, while Polina expressed a desire to follow the Soviet gender framework—pursuing an education and a professional life, and getting married later on. Her vision of womanhood remained nevertheless highly constricted by moral rules of purity. She embraced the Chechen idea of purity in gender relations, but also echoed Soviet-era moral judgements of sexual promiscuity. Women who sexually engaged with soldiers of various armies embodied, in Polina's thinking, the corruption of Chechen society in wartime.

The analysis of the diary illuminates the necessity of contextualization in personal narratives. Polina never explicitly stated an affiliation with Soviet politics or ideologies, or nostalgia for the Soviet era, as she saw the post-Soviet independence era as the peaceful age of the Chechnya. She did, however, use a typically Soviet framework to approach many aspects of life. While using references to Chechen culture, she approached religion from an Enlightened approach of moral law, and valued education —over Chechen and non-Chechen topics—, multi

[310] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 431.

culturalism, moral purity for men and women. Her strong emphasis on culture and morality, as opposed to piety and national identity, point to her expressing appreciation for the Caucasus in a Soviet way. This proves the pervasiveness of Soviet frameworks even after years of separatist discourse and violent warfare.

Polina the child and Zherebtsova the adult provide differing examples of imagining the self in a historical perspective. Her self-construction in the diary revolves around the idea of witnessing. In contrast, following the publication of her diary, she took on the emphasized her position as a victim, in her witnessing process and outside of it. This appeared through her self-characterization as a victim of a "genocide against the inhabitants of the Chechen Republic."[311] In the recent past, she formulated herself as a victim of the current political regime, both as a child and as an adult attempting to publish. Her pro-Western angle of attack against the regime differs greatly from her anti-Western, ethnically-fluid childhood account, where she never particularly blamed the Russian leadership —only, the war itself.

The publication of Zherebtsova's diary provoked a public debate over the authenticity of her account, and the press coverage of the debate put her into spotlight, whereas she was unknown before and only 2000 copies were printed. Crucially, all segments of Russian and Chechen press accepted her diary as an authentic piece, each granting her an important place in their narrative of the war. In Russia, the war diary opened up the conversation about the mistakes of the Second War to an unusual extent for the official media. Usually, the official discourse regarding the Second Chechen War entrenches it as the reparation of previous mistakes under Yeltsin and encourages all-around silence over it.

In line with their previous and current coverage of Chechnya as a matter that should be discussed, the opposition press championed Polina and granted her a tribune to articulate her new political goals. Chechen human rights associations, and Salafi news sources followed her

[311] Karmodi, “Ya Prishla, Chtoby Stat’ Svidetelem. [I Came to Witness].”

case closely and championed her as a proof to human rights abuses and the corruption and illegitimacy of the Russian regime, respectively. Western narrations looked to get information on Putin personally, and his role in the violence in Chechnya and in Polina's life.

At this point in Chechen memory, only more numerous testimonies will help understand the real impact of the conflict on the civilian population, especially in multi-cultural Grozny. Whereas Zherebtsova is working to compile them, there are still too few testimonies of life in Chechnya to truly understand the scale of certain civilian behaviors depicted in her diary, and their meaning in the current state of affairs.

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