Levashovo Memorial Cemetery: Constructing the Memory of Soviet Political Repression in Russia in the 1990s-2000s

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Abstract

Levashovo is the mass burial of the victims of Soviet political repression in the region of Saint-Petersburg that was discovered in 1989. Later, Levashovo became a memorial cemetery of the repressed and experienced the political changes, determined by the interchanging political courses of destalinization and restalinization during and after the Soviet period. Despite the ambiguity of new Russian historical policies, shaped by searching for a new Russian identity, Levashovo had a chance to become a common space for construction and development of the memorial culture about Soviet political repression. Notwithstanding the lack of attention of Russian politicians to the enhancement of Levashovo as a memorial cemetery, Levashovo became an example of how the complex and diverse Russian memorial culture about the repression can be represented in its materiality. No monument dedicated to the repressed could absorb and reflect the multiformity of this memory. However, Levashovo, discovered, organized and designed by bearers of multiple memorial cultures about the repressed, presents the memorial that offers such consent. In this thesis, by tracing how Russian historical policies of the 1990s-2000s affected the narrative about Soviet political repression, I look at how those changes influenced the commemorating communities in their remembrance practices, which during the last thirty years were forming Levashovo as the memorial cemetery we know today.

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Introduction

"As soon as the existence of the first
Stalinist mass graves was made a public
fact people began to come."

Catherine Merridale, *The Tide of Bones*

In 1989, after a year of searching, a small group of "Poisk"[1] activists led by Valentin Muravsky from the St. Petersburg branch of "Memorial"[2] discovered a large mass grave of victims of Soviet political repression within the Leningrad Region. After months of collecting information and potential burial grounds of the executed, which was collected through unofficial sources (radio, TV, newspapers), the circle of potential burials was narrowed down.[3] Only with the help of local representatives of the Party's Executive Committee and the State Security Committee, who succumbed to the expanded policy of *glasnost'*,[4] was it possible to establish the exact geographic location. An inconspicuous pinewood next to the closely adjacent houses of the village of Levashovo turned out to be the long-standing property of the local branch of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR). Officially called a dacha, and in society, the named *Levashovskaya pustosch'* (Levashovo wasteland) is a grave for tens of thousands of people.

After the Leningrad mass grave of the victims of the Great Terror was opened to the public, Levashovo began to transform. Instant public interest in the newly discovered facts and

[1] This group, consisting of a number of activists, was formed in the 1980s and was initially engaged in the search for missing people during the years of Soviet repression. During the investigation, the group listed the potential mass graves of the repressed in the Leningrad area and requested official confirmation or assistance from the state security authorities.

[2] Memorial was founded by Veniamin Ioffe, the political prisoner of the 1960s, as a center for the study of Soviet political repressions and the creation of a scientific and archival commission on those related issues. Officially registered in 1991. In November 2015, Memorial was recognized as a foreign agent.

[3] Valentin Muravskiy, "Poisk zavershen?" [Search Completed?], *Vestnik Memoriala*, 1989.

[4] Glasnost' was the policy of political openness and transparency and the freedom of information, proclaimed by Mikhail Gorbatschev in the 1980s.

the long-term torment of the unknown for the relatives of the repressed turned the overgrown burial grounds into a place of pilgrimage. People began to come individually, in families, or in organized groups to honor the memory of the dead, hoping that their relative was lying in one of several graves. They left spontaneous, original, and individual memorial signs, attaching them to the trunk of trees: portraits of victims, extracts from execution sentences, fragments of official orders of the NKVD, Orthodox or Catholic crosses, icons, candles, ribbons, flags, and other national symbols (deer, to honor the repressed Finns). In addition to personal memorial signs, on the territory of the cemetery one can find many collective monuments dedicated to various social groups.

Over the decades, Levashovo developed as a place of collective commemoration of the victims of Soviet political repression, where every grieving person found and will find a place to honor the memory of the repressed. Unfortunately, the attention that the Levashovo burial ground got from the public did not lead to the identification of the bodies rested there. In the present thesis I inquire if there was a better scenario for transforming Levashovo into a memorial cemetery, and how this process took place.

In 1991, after the demise of the USSR, the situation around the question of remembrance of Soviet negative legacies changed. Repressions and thousands of victims were no longer a taboo topic for socio-political debates after Perestroika, when memory about Soviet political repression had a chance to become public. Transforming governmental structures were familiar with the civil response and inquiries referring to this issue and already took its role in the construction of new memory politics through the experience of the Rehabilitation Committee. Though those changes were quite slow, they prepared the ground for future interactions and dialogue on issues of memory of repressions from a different perspective. Now, when victims were heard and commemorative practices of the repressed emerged as

monuments, this revealed NKVD shooting ranges, partly opened archives, martyrologies, religious services, etc.; the "right" to commemorate was finally fully freed from the ideologically controlled historical narrative.

The main changes happened in juridical regulations of memory politics in Russia. Throughout the 1990s-2000s, the Russian government tried to develop new laws to establish an official course on the commemoration of victims of repression. These frequency of these changes during this decade became an uncomprehensive and sometimes controversial topic, mostly due to the change of the political leaders and their government appointees who had different perceptions regarding the public memory of repression. These ups and downs were closely linked to a search for a new Russian identity after the collapse of the USSR. The disintegration of the USSR also led to a gradual building and acceptance of the social repressions that took place during the soviet times., due to the ideas of west-oriented and new Russian politicians who were ready to cut ties with the Soviet past.[5] However, the emergence in mid-1990s of the opposition of two certain memory cultures (about Soviet repression and the Great Patriotic war) changed the whole course of historical policies in Russia. The rupture between these two plots of state's nation-building started. Heroic past and memory of the Great Patriotic War changed the attitude to the figure of Stalin and confronted rising critiques to Soviet politics in society. As Kathy Frierson observes, *"the juxtaposition of Soviet abuses of its citizens through repression with Soviet victory over the Germans in World War II was a continuous thread of debates about laws on rehabilitation."*[6] At that time, memory laws became an instrument of historical politics. From 1991, Russia developed as a past-oriented

[5] Nikolai Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[6] Cathy Frierson, "Russia's Law 'On Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression': 1991-2011, An Enduring Artifact of the Dismantling of the Soviet Regime, Transitional Justice, and the Aspiration for a Rule of Law State," First of two refereed research reports to *National Council for Eurasian and East European Research* (April 2014).

country, whose identity was, and still is, strongly dependent on historical heritage and historical memory.

Monuments began to appear from the times of the Soviet regime when the first memorial was erected in Moscow (1990).[7] Non-governmental institutions of collective remembrance of the repression, former prisoners and their relatives were looking for its visual representation of their memories in a solid form to create a place for commemoration and to strengthen the presence of such memory in a public space. As we can see from competitions for the best monument dedicated to the victims, organized in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, the result of such events was almost zero.[8] It mostly happened because the members of the discussion for choosing the best project for future memorial had very different expectations on how their memory should be visualized. The term 'repressed' in the Soviet context includes a list of meanings, which makes it complicated to depict a victim itself (male, female, child, nationality), the cause of death (disease, hunger, shot), beliefs (religion), etc. Even the signs of prison, the image of injustices, or a perpetrator has multiple varieties. The huge flux of different perceptions of how this memory should be represented showed that it is hard to reach a consensus in common remembering when it comes to the question of "how and where to commemorate?". The solidification of the memory about the repression in monuments, which was achieved in the 1990s and continued further, did not help to establish a sustainable culture of remembrance of the repressed in Russia.[9] I argue that after the fall of the Soviet Union, the

[7] This memorial is a granite block brought from the Solovetsky Islands, where the camp SLON was located. This symbolic stone was installed on Lubyanka Square next to the former KGB and state security's buildings. It is symbolic that today the successor to the KGB, the FSB, is located here.

[8] The competitions for the best memorial to the victims of Soviet political repression were organized in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg in 1988-1990 as a move towards the solidification of collective memory about the repressed. Both competitions were organized as a public discussion of presented projects, but the diversity of individual perceptions of potential monuments left the competitions without results.

[9] First monuments (Solovetsky Stones) were erected in Moscow (1990) and Saint-Peterburg (2002; only the pedestal for the stone was built in 1990). Later various monuments like "Metaphysical Sphinxes" (1995), "Mask of Sorrow" (1996), "Wall of Sorrow" (2017) were erected. Interestingly, the involvement of political figures gradually arose through the years.

Russian memorial culture about repressions affected by new memory politics was far more complex and, at times, ambiguous to enclose it in a single monument.

In this thesis I argue that the ambiguity and complexity of the memory politics in Russia after the 1991 can be seen in the manner in which the Levashovo memorial cemetery was perceived and transformed in the last three decades. I underline how the public memorial policies of Russia after 1991 and how the bearers of memory about the Soviet political repression victims transformed the Levashovo cemetery from a mere burial place into a diverse and multicultural site of memory about the repressed. In other words, through the commemoration of the victims buried there, the visitors turned Levashovo into a place, which not only allows various memorial cultures' agents to freely express their values and reproduce their commemorative practices, but it also creates a base for organic co-existence of those memories in the common space.

Levashovo has undergone changes under the influence of the dynamics of historical politics in Russia and became an officially recognized memorial cemetery of the victims of Soviet political repression. The Russian memory politics of the 1990s-2000s altered memorial culture about the repression and affected its practices of collective remembering. The main issues lie in the state-controlled historical narratives that highly shapes, sometimes even suppresses, the public opinion on the memory of Soviet repression. This restriction of cultural memory often diminishes the active interest people take in monuments and memorial complexes built around the country. In this thesis I claim that some official memorial policies, as well as the people's personal interest in Levashovo shaped this burial place into an archetype of the memorial cemetery dedicated to the repressed. This argument also agrees and follows the steps of social scientists interested in historical and anthropological studies who set perspectives for how Russian memorial culture can be changed and developed in the future in

such a way that the historical memory of political repression is integrated into the foreground, and not forgotten.

As one may think, the problem lies in public consensus. But as the experience with public debates on monuments dedicated to the victims shows, the public consensus is neither easy to develop nor helpful when it is attained. Though eliminating political taboo allowed society to initiate monuments, their presence does not prevent manipulations with historical narratives. One monument, erected as a result of public consensus will face another monument to Stalin and the process of 'fight back' can be endless.

My thesis stands at the crossroads of several research areas and approaches to the subjects of memory culture and memory politics about the Soviet political repression in contemporary Russia. The main context-forming block of literature refers to the issues of post-Soviet Russia and other former Soviet republics, which often deals with the questions of post-Communist newly constructed identities[10] and newly emerged historical politics.[11] Such topics are usually interconnected with the problematics of memory culture and memory laws' making.[12] When one gives an overview of law projects and their transformations under the influence of altered political courses, others explore how those laws controlled the discussion

[10] Ivan Kurilla, "Memory Wars in the Post- Soviet Space," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo,* no. 63 (September 2009); Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, "Monumental Politics: Regime Type and Public Memory in Post-Communist States," *Post-Soviet Affairs 27,* no. 3 (2011): 269-288; Ekaterina Klimenko, "The Politics of Oblivion and the Practices of Remembrance: Repression, Collective Memory and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia," in *Historical Memory of European Communisms Before and After 1989,* ed. by Stanislav Holubec, Agnieszka Mrozik (New York: Routledge, 2018), 141-162.

[11] Amir Weiner, "The Making of the Dominant Myth: the Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities with the Soviet Polity," *Russian Review 55,* no. 4 (October 1996), 638-650; Kathleen Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory in the Yeltsin Era,* (Cornell University Press, 2002); Catherine Merridale, "Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia," *Journal of Contemporary History 38,* no. 1 (January 2003), 13-28; Anatoly Khazanov, "What Went Wrong? Post-Communist Transformations in Comparative Perspective," In *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia*, edited by Yitzhak Brudny, Jonathan Frankel and Stefani Hoffman, (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21-51.

[12] Cathy Frierson, "Russia's Law 'On Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression': 1991-2011, An Enduring Artifact of the Dismantling of the Soviet Regime, Transitional Justice, and the Aspiration for a Rule of Law State," First of two refereed research reports to *National Council for Eurasian and East European Research* (April 2014); Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

on memory about repression between politicians, civil activists, survivors and their relatives, representatives of foreign nationalities, and ordinary sympathizers. The efficient aspect of some of these works is the comparative observation of the post-Socialist memory-constructing processes on the international level.[13] Such a perspective allows one to widely analyze how broader national communities deal with the traumatic past of the Soviet legacy. Besides, these studies sometimes focus on the practice of commemorating the victims of repression in various national communities, showing how differently the instrumentalization of history can influence the acts of memorialization.

Another stratum of research is dedicated to the development of practices of memorialization of Soviet political repression during the Soviet times (mainly late 1980s-1991) and post-Soviet period, divided by the political ups and downs which affected the memory culture about the repressed through continuous historical policy making processes.[14] Since memorialization found its embodiment in the various monuments and museums in the last three decades, scholars started to be concerned about the problems and complexities of this process of memory solidification.[15] Usually, these works discuss the peculiarities of Russian material memory culture about the Soviet political repression, revealing the questions of how the memory is represented, who is involved in its publicization or what social and political processes stand behind those actions. A major part of this thematic block are the studies on how diverse mourning communities visually represent their memory about the repression and what are the outcomes of these attempts to construct certain memorial symbolics. These works

[13] Forest and Johnson, "Monumental Politics."; Ruth Wodak, Gertraud Borea, *Justice and Memory. Confronting Traumatic Pasts. An International Comparison* (Passagen Verlag, 2009); several chapters in Malgorzata Pakier, Bo Strath, *A European Memory?: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembranc,* (Berghahn Books, 2010).
[14] Koposov, "Memory Laws, Memory Wars"; Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past,* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
[15] Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth Century Russia* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013); Kathleen Smith, "A monument for our Times? Commemorating Victims of Repression in Putin's Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies 71*, no. 8 (2019), 1314-1344.

are similar and often come to the same result, showing that no monument can express public consent and call for reflection.[16]

Despite the large number of studies that reveal the theme of memory about Soviet political repressions, the practices of memorialization and the inclusion of these processes in broader historical social and political contexts, memorial cemeteries remained only a supporting part of the research. However, after the well-established tradition among research to elaborate on the questions of a possibility to build a common memorial to commemorate the victims of Soviet political repression in Russia, scholars started to change the focus of their interest to the sites of former Gulag camps and burial grounds as self-contained phenomenon.[17] The attempts to present profound research were made earlier, but these works mostly contributed to the broader issue of memorial symbols and memorial material culture of the repressed. Thus, in my thesis I share and support the tendency to pay greater attention to memorial cemeteries – shooting pits (in particular, to Levashovo) and their importance for making a significant contribution to the further development of a memorial culture about the Soviet political repression and their victims in Russia.

In this study I work with documents from Russian State Archives geographically limited to the area of Saint-Petersburg, as well as with documents from the local 'Memorial' Center. Whereas the state archives provide official decrees related to historical policy-making and regulation of memorial sites in Saint-Petersburg region, the non-governmental archive of Memorial contains public responses to those actions. I also use the articles from periodicals, published in the period 1990-2000s, which are related to the public discussions and social

[16] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (Columbia University Press, 2000); Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth Century Russia* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Zuzanna Bogumil, Dominique Moran, Elly Harrowell, "Sacred or Secular? 'Memorial', the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Contested Commemoration of Soviet Repressions," *Europe-Asia Studies 67*, no. 9 (2015), 1416-1444.

[17] Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby,"The Gulag Reclaimed as Sacred Space: The Negotiation of Memory at the Holy Spring of Iskitim," *Laboratorium*, no. 1 (January 2015), 51-70.

reflections on the topics of memory about Soviet political repression. Here, I compare these materials in a close connection action-reaction / inaction-reaction to trace how the relationship between the state policy of memory and civil memorial culture about Soviet political repressions concurrently developed. This approach helps to highlight the efforts of the authorities in building a certain national-historical identity, as well as the ability of social formations to critically respond to such processes.

Many sources of special value for this research are visual materials. The collections of photographs from the Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents reveals the evolution of development of Levashovo Wasteland throughout the 1990s. I provide these visual pieces of local visitors to represent the developing processes of the whole site, the gradual appearance of collective and individual memorials, the variety of those mourning signs and the commemoration rituals practiced there. To trace the transformations of the memorial cemetery from the 2000s, I use photographs taken by other researchers or participants of commemoration ceremonies and put them together with photographs taken by me for a small project about Levashovo in 2019. To avoid making my analysis descriptive, I use visual resources in conjunction with archival documents. By using these visual materials, I show how the Levashovo memorial cemetery has undergone changes under the influence of the dynamics of historical politics in Russia over the past three decades.

Other sources that I refer to in my thesis are news and articles published online. They are mostly used to represent the activity of various socio-political memory actors and their commemorative practices. These informational sites are especially valuable to demonstrate in which contexts the interest to Levashovo, as a place of commemoration of the repressed, arises.

Along with the mentioned sources, I use the reviews from the visitor's book, booklets created for excursions, the programs of the annual visit to Levashovo on October 30, as well

as possible documented processions and rituals for the opening of collective monuments. I use and analyze the listed materials in their interconnection to provide a representative picture of the 'life' of the Levashovo cemetery. The personalities, communities and events attached to it, demonstrate both the presence and the absence of certain memorial agents and practices there, that constitute the understanding of the current Russian memorial culture about the Soviet political repression.

To build a consolidated memorial culture, the current memorial narrative about the repressed has to transit into a dialogic remembering within Russia and with its neighbors. Levashovo and its commemorating diversity would be such a basis that can serve as good support for the joint dialogue between nations. The exhumation and identification of the buried bodies, the declassification of official documents would mark the full acceptance by Russia of its responsibility for the crimes against both its citizens and to citizens of other states. At a time when many former member states of the communist bloc were actively building their post-socialist identities through anti-communist rhetoric, recognition and repentance are becoming increasingly undesirable for Russia. However, Levashovo is already a place of transnational, intergroup, universally equal grief. The efforts of the state and its interest in cooperation to fully elaborate on the memory of Soviet political repression could have a positive effect on the historical, political, and international status of Russia.

I would like to note that I do not want to reduce the importance of a monument in the question of remembering the repressed, especially when the image of a perpetrator is not yet represented in them. However, a memorial such as mass graves left at the former shooting ranges has a more stable nature and incontestable meaning. *"Memorials permit only some things to be remembered and, by exclusion, cause others to be forgotten. Memorials conceal the past as much as they cause us to remember it,"* argues Paul Connerton, providing an

important distinction between **memorial** and **locus** of memory due to their mnemonic function.[18] When the monument is the result of the will to remember a particular past, locus leaves room for the coexistence of history, events, people, activities in their temporal and spatial order. Those mass graves, which are called 'memorial cemeteries' in a way to transform them into memorials, pretend to be locuses of memory. Such cemeteries are located in many regions of Russia, they were revealed to the public in different years, they have diverse sizes and levels of care, but most of them are mass graves of unidentified bodies. Those collective graves became places of commemoration of multi-layered memory cultures, which found their visual representation in a chaotic order, and at the same time formed sites of collective remembering.

In my work, I operate with the term 'collective memory', which was offered and developed by Halbwachs.[19] According to him, collective memory is formed by individuals, whose personal experiences activate in the frame of a social group or existing shared context and is aimed to give this group common functions and build a common identity. Even though his concept of collective memory is often taken by scholars, it has transformed further in academic research. When relations between individual and collective memory are easy to explain in a both-sided direction of mutual effect, more attention goes to the nature and functions of collectives formed by memory.[20] Those groups are not only remembering communities of different sizes, but they also contain individuals of different nationalities, political views, religions, social statuses, etc. What is important here is that, in contradistinction to Halbwachs, these individuals, united under the term 'bearers of memory', are from a non-similar generation. Thus, the main change happened in the perception of collective memory as

[18] Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29.
[19] Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
[20] Stephanie Bird, Mary Fulbrook, Julia Wagner, and Christiane Wienand, *Reverberations of Nazi Violence in Germany and beyond : Disturbing Pasts,* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 5.

a group that can only exist when it has people, who directly experienced the memory which is cultivated.[21] Aleida and Jan Assmann further developed this idea by thinking more about the 'outcomes' of collective remembering. [22] They offer to distinguish "cultural" and "communicative" memory, where the first is mostly preserved and represented as an artifact (as solid) and the last is transmitted memory through generations. The very concept of communicative memory allows covering the process of memory being remembered, reproduced with acts of commemoration regardless of the level of individual's connection to remembered past.

Another two interrelated terms are 'memory culture' and 'memory politics'. The understanding of memory as culture refers to the process of institutionalization of memory-based on a shared narrative in society. It leads to the appearance of various social groups/collectives, whom I perceive as 'agents' of memory. Memory politics appear when a certain collective with a social power goes to understanding of a past and constructs a historical narrative with a memory attached to it. It does not mean that at the same time other social groups are not having their understanding of history. The key fact is the presence of the power to put one narrative above the rest. Since I speak about those institutions of power in the framework of a state, memory politics in this case are always connected to national identity.

The memory, that was brought to the level of a state and established as a part of official historical narrative, reaches the ground of "dialogic memory". Assmann perceives this model of dialogic remembering as a signal that a traumatic past is ready for transformation into an acknowledgment of guilt.[23] Additionally, she is sure that such a memory prevents renewed

[21] Stephanie Bird, Mary Fulbrook, Julia Wagner, and Christiane Wienand, *Reverberations of Nazi Violence*, 6.
[22] Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nunning (Berlin, New York, 2008), 110.
[23] Aleida Assmann, "From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with Traumatic Past," In *Conflict, memory transfers and the reshaping of Europe*, ed. by Helena Goncalves da Silva (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publ., 2010), 15.

violence. Though, she points out, dialogic memory can also exist within one state. The absence of outer and the complexity of inner dialogic memory in Russia regarding the issue of remembering of victims of Soviet political repression is caused by Russia's official historical narrative which is aimed to construct and reserve a new identity of a particular heroic past. Russia is not ready to switch to "negative commemoration", which Heidemarie Uhl defines as *"the memory of what 'we' did to others rather than what others did to 'us'"*.[24] The reproduction of any historical narrative, which tends to be remembered, includes the ritualization of memory it contains and has its *lieux de memoire*. So, the 'wrong' past here tends to eliminate and destroy the identity being built.

It is usually not fully clear who exactly remembers and carries the memory. If we perceive an 'agent' as both an individual and a social group, the term gets a fairly wide meaning and controversial distinction. With a quick look at Levashovo, one can notice that collectives as well as individuals are represented there and not even separately, but in a close interrelation. But does it mean that agents, who initiated and created memorials at the cemetery, are strictly separated on individuals and groups? If we go back to Halbwach's definition of collective memory, we will see why he did not elaborate deeply on individual memory. Individuals can remember, but to make the act of remembrance their memory should be evoked and triggered, it should constantly circulate and be shared in a social framework. Every collective of memory and its common narrative is formed by individuals. Every community of remembering has many contributors, with diverse levels of engagement and experience, but still, each of them brings something to a common narrative. To not be stuck in circled issues of definitions, I pay attention to collective memories with no exclusion of the role of individuals in it. To underestimate an individual from a single group is equal to underestimation of one group from

[24] Heidemarie Uhl, "Culture, Politics, Palimpsest: Theses on Memory and Society," in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* ed. by Malgorzata Pakier, Bo Straight, 79-87. Berghahn Books, 2010. 82.

the whole community of remembering. As I mentioned before, it is a two-sided process of contributing, so that the common narrative further affects an individual's memory too.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Each part will gradually uncover the whole issue of the work by elaborating on various aspects of memory culture about the Soviet political repression in the post-Soviet Russia. Revising the development of state historical politics and public concerns about commemoration of such an undesirable past as Soviet political repression, I will move onto the question of Levashovo as a current example of dialogic commemoration of the victims of repression at one place. I further show what example Levashovo provides as a memorial in comparison to the other sites of commemoration, how it forms a single platform for the complex Russian memorial culture about the repressed, and how it allows a huge diversity of contrasted memorials coexist together. In conclusion I suggest that the solidification of memory in a monument is not enough for the construction of a common memorial culture and a dialogic commemoration of the repressed. Until now, no monument to victims of repression in Russia could fulfill such a function. Visual materials, representing the variety of memorials at Levashovo (and not only there), show the complexity of making a common memorial dedicated to miscellaneous victims of repression. Here, I demonstrate that Levashovo memorial cemetery with its ability to combine the wide diversity of memorial culture at its site has a potential to become a place of Russia's acceptance, together with a historical continuity, of responsibility for Soviet political repression.

CHAPTER 1. Janus-faced Stalin: Two Contradictory Historical Narratives in Russia

This chapter refers to a broad context of political and cultural changes in post-Soviet Russia, focusing more on the attitude towards the Soviet past and the remembrance of Soviet political repression, which were pre-determined in the USSR's changing politics. I examine Russia's historical policies and its newly constructed historical identities before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The goal of the chapter is to show how Russia used the mechanism of memory policymaking through the instrumentalization of history to create and support the state-translated course of a particular historical narrative. What is important is the ways by which the official historical perspective interfered in the public debates and affected the social possibility to critically reassess the Soviet repression. The interplay of memory politics included, and still includes two main historical accounts, both bounded on the figure of Stalin: memory about the Great Patriotic War and memory about Soviet political repression. When the first narrative becomes a tool for nation-building, the latter remains behind but does not disappear.

1.1.First Discussion about Stalinism

The beginning of criticism of Stalinism and repressive state policy first happened in 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev presented his "secret speech" at the closed XX Congress of the CPSU criticizing the Stalin's cult of personality. Public condemnation of the mass repression of the 1930-1950s in governmental circles served as the beginning of a conversation about Soviet repressions inside the country. Even though the report was secret, its influence on the party and the active discussion it triggered in the parties of other union's republics led to the

spreading of the speech in unofficial circles.[25] Not only were members of the congress familiarized with its content, but general public too. Khrushchev's motives for this decision were ambiguous. In his memoirs, he writes: “After all, we already know that the people who were subjected to repression were innocent and were not “enemies of the people”.[26] They are honest people, devoted to the party, revolution and Lenin's cause of building socialism in the USSR. They will return from exiles. We will not keep them there. We need to think about how to return them.”[27] However, most likely, this gesture was made immediately after Stalin's death in order to limit the catalyzed processes of discrediting the authorities and criticizing the political system among citizens. This idea was once confirmed by Anastas Mikoyan, a party member, who perceived such an act as an opportunity to restore the party’s authority and credibility.[28]

Repressions and responsibility in Khrushchev’s report were assigned to the personality of Stalin himself, thereby characterizing not the Soviet system itself, but the particular methods of Stalin's power. At the same time, the rhetoric in the speech changed sharply by justifying Stalin's actions and by listing his merits and services to the homeland and people.[29] This form of cautious criticism created an ambiguous attitude towards the policy of Stalinism and political repression for the following decades. Besides, it is important to note that Khrushchev sowed the seeds of serious constraints on the problematic framework of the future discussion of Soviet political repression, which further resulted in the unanswered questions of "whom to blame?"

[25] Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag returnees, crime and the fate of reform after Stalin,* (Cornell University Press, 2011), 108-109.
[26] The term was often used in cases of conviction to the death penalty in the 1930s and 40s.
[27] Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer,* 92.
[28] Martin and Sveshnikov, *Istorichesky sbornik ‘Pamyat’: issledovaniya I materialy,* [Historical collection "Memory". Research and materials] (Novoye Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 2017), 19.
[29] “O kul'te lichnosti i yego posledstviyakh» - Doklad Nikity Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na KHKH s"yezde KPSS: Dokumenty.” [On the personality cult and its consequences’ - Report by Nikita Khrushchev on the Stalin personality cult at the XX Congress of the CPSU: Documents] *Encyclopedia* (ROSSPEN, 2002), 57, 112.

and “who was unjustifiably repressed?” throughout the 20th century, complicating the formation of a single Russian memorial culture about the victims of repression.

Khrushchev's calls to combat any manifestations and attempts to revive the "cult of personality" and his proposal to take Stalin's body out of the Mausoleum gave confidence in the reality of a change in the course of the new ideological line. As the Soviet historian Alexander Nekrich recalls: “There is no need to say with what enthusiasm thousands of people…took what happened at the congress... It seemed that everything was developing in the right direction.”[30] The reaction to Khrushchev's report both within the party and in the country was characterized by its ambiguous assessment: from complete support to complete rejection. Criticism of the Stalinist regime, censure of its arbitrariness inspired hope for the country’s democratic transformation with restoration of individual’s freedom, of the right to vote and with establishment of the guarantees that repression will not repeat again.[31] But the party leadership pursued a completely different goal, striving to preserve its dictatorship and monopoly on power.

1.2. Curtailed Destalinization under Brezhnev

With the removal of Khrushchev from the post of First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in 1964, his previously indicated course of official de-Stalinization began to gradually curtail. Dissatisfied with the growing rates of anti-Stalinist propaganda, the leadership almost immediately banned all the attempts to uncover the issues of Soviet political

[30] Alexander Nekrich, *Otreshis’ ot strakha. Vospominania istorika*, [Renouncing fear. Memoirs of a historian] (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1979), 140-141. After his book “1941. June 22” about the Great Patriotic War was published in 1965, he was accused of anti-Soviet propaganda and was forced to emigrate to the United States later in 1975.

[31] In December 1988, the last case was initiated under Article 70 "Anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" of the RSFSR Criminal Code against members of the Democratic Union Party. In response to the persecutions, a group of Leningrad poets wrote a protest letter with the goal of giving this trial wide publicity and with a call to stop using criminal articles and repressive methods in the "ideological struggle." The case was closed on September 13, 1989, due to changes in Soviet legislation.

repression in the press and public. The new Soviet leadership, led by Leonid Brezhnev, decided to stop de-Stalinization in order to reduce anti-Stalinist sentiments within society: as Levitsky succinctly interpreted this in 1974, "The new party leadership does not want to be reminded of the past."[32] The authorities were now interested in preserving the prestige of the party, which was threatened by the high activity and interest of society in discovering the truth about the mass atrocities committed by the state apparatus and in seeking the immediate rehabilitation of victims of political terror.[33] The new policy was accompanied by severe censorship and all kinds of methods to prohibit alternative methods of writing Soviet history.

The first attempt to suppress anti-Stalinist sentiments in society through substitution with another historical narrative was made in 1965. The party, dissatisfied with the growing turnover of anti-Stalinist propaganda, designated the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War.[34] It was a "convenient" event for a conservative ideological turn towards the partial rehabilitation of the "oppressor of nations" in the eyes of society. After the exposure of the truth about mass repressions, Stalin was credited with, as a counterbalance, his professionalism as the commander-in-chief, who saved the "center of world communism" from the Nazi invaders.[35]

The emerging democratic trend in the dissident movement of the 1970s became a new space for the functioning of the memory about the Soviet political repression. The discussions

[32] Boris Levytsky, *The Stalinist Terror in the Thirties: Documentation from the Soviet Press*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Pres, 1974).
[33] Albert Van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization in the Soviet Union: Political Rehabilitations in the Soviet Union since Stalin*, (London and Sydney, 1986).
[34] In fact, it was the first huge celebration of victory in the Soviet-Russian history. From 1945 to 1964, The 9th of May was an official day of grief and the commemoration was embodied in the tradition of making fireworks.
[35] To read more about the tradition of celebrating the Victory Day in the USSR and Russia: Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia, (*New York: BasicBooks, 1994); Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, (Princeton University Press, 2001); *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, edited by David Hoffmann, (Routledge, forthcoming).

had to disappear from the public and the memory about the repressed had to go underground. At this time, the authorities, in the fight against "dissent", resumed a repressive policy of persecution, which caused a wave of indignation among the broad masses, instilling fears of a return to already familiar methods. It is crucial to note that the movement to perpetuate the memory of victims of political repression in the 1970s went along with rising human rights activities.[36] The struggle to restore justice to the unjustifiably convicted was almost always justified in violation of the legislative framework, calling not only for their revision, but also for further observance of the Constitution of the USSR. This common ground of struggle for justice, for the guarantee and protection of the rights and freedoms of Soviet citizens, created by the dissidents, supported and popularized the commemoration of the victims of political repression in the society.

1.3.Democratic Changes of Perestroika: Continued Destalinization

After a long period of Brezhnev's stagnation (1967-1982), characterized by the curtailment of the state policy of rehabilitation and an attempt by the leadership to return to Stalinist ideological principles, disguised as a general picture of political "stability", another era of destalinization came with the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev. The idea of glasnost', proclaimed by him as one of the main directions of the new state policy, became the basic characteristic of the comprehensive transformations of the country in the second half of the 1980s. The political elites' first cautious attempts to publicly speak about the problems of the Stalinist repressions victims, along with various contradictions among party representatives, served as an impetus for these elites to construct a memory about the terror but also to search for an area of its own accumulation and functioning during this period.

[36] The dissident movement was defined as democratic by such historians as: Wolfgang Leonhard (1976), Lyudmila Alexeeva (1985), Nicolas Werth (1992), Benjamin Natans (2018).

However, by the times of sharp political changes of Perestroika, the unstable model of memory about Soviet political repression was inherited with the problematics of setting the chronological framework of terror, searching for the perpetrators and calling for the restoration of justice, set by the XX Congress of the CPSU well before. Long-lasting discontent with the non-linear policies of the party elites regarding the issue of political repression and the continuing arrests of members of activist associations were soon picked up by the democratic transformations of Perestroika, which brought up the memory of the victims of repression again to the public level.

"The society has changed, the efforts of individuals to change something...gave rise to changes in consciousness, stimulated changes...We stopped living in a society where history had stopped. It revived, moved - revived in the people themselves."[37] – wrote Mariia Goldovskaya, a Soviet-Russian documentary filmmaker in 1991. Perestroika's democratic transformations led to the rise of political thought and interest of Soviet citizens in the revision of the recent past. With the policy of glasnost', members of dissident circles and former Gulag prisoners could finally bring the issue of political repressions into the public sphere by intervening in journals, newspapers, television, and radio to share their experiences.[38]The historians started to publish new books on Soviet times, breaking through the ideology-shaped propagandistic scholarships. Social initiative and rising public activism demanded to demolish monuments and streets dedicated to the revealed perpetrators.[39] On the general wave of historical and political rethinking of the past, the memory about Soviet repression began to

[37] Mariia Goldovskaya. "Woman with a movie camera," *Iskusstvo kino* 6, (1991), 70-77.
[38] The mass media became a main channel of communication for former prisoners during Nikita Khrushchev's 'Thaw', when they could transmit and exchange their experiences of imprisonment. To read more: Denis Kozlov. *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past.*Cambridge, (MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[39] Such demonstrations and rallies often appealed to the names of well-known heads of the communist party and NKVD in the years of the Great Terror. During Perestroika, the largest social campaigns were organized against Nikolai Ezhov and Andrei Zhdanov.

transform into material representations through emerging commemorative practices, institutionalization, and museumification.

With the growing public interest in the Soviet traumatic experience of the past in the late 1980s, the active role of revising the historical past took visual artists, who started to reflect on such theme and translate it in another, nonverbal, language. The film "Repentance" (produced in 1984),[40] released in 1987 by the Soviet-Georgian film director Tengiz Abuladze, who for the first time openly presented the problems of totalitarian terror and regime's responsibility for the crimes, attracted wide attention of broad Soviet society. The film, without precise topographical and personal references, shows the Great Terror in action from the perspective of the main character, the woman called Ketevan, whose family suffered from the "hands" of the repressive machine. Driven by the aim of revenge, she repeatedly digs out the body of the dictator from the grave and consequently ends up in the dock. The entire film is based on the heroine's story of her repressed family during the trial. Here, according to the director's idea, the story of one person reflected the life and suffering of citizens from the tyranny and repression of the entire space of the socialist regime's hegemony. The broader scope of the director's message was the call for repentance and rethinking of the past, which is shown in the film through the family of the dictator himself, multi-generational members of which had to face and reflect the suddenly publicly announced story of one victim.

The Commission of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU for the rehabilitation of victims of political repression was formed and began its work in 1987.[41] It is significant that, with Perestroika's principle of publicity, the mass media was allowed to attend

[40] Tengiz Abuladze, "Repentance," filmed 1984, video, 153 min, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdiZCRH9Vj4.

[41] The commission was led by Alexander Yakovlev, who became one of the first representatives of the authorities who actively supported destalinization.

the meetings of the commission.[42] The time frame covering the period of repression has ceased to be associated only directly with Stalin, defining "Stalinism" itself as the result of the work of the Soviet system, incapable of building socialism:

> The CPSU has repeatedly demonstrated its inability to reform and democratic renewal. <...> The CPSU was and remains an antinational force, the main obstacle on the way to the humane, civilized development of our society.[43]

And in 1990, during the last official demonstration in honor of the anniversary of the 1917 revolution, the Soviet democratic formations recognized October 25 (November 7) as the day of the armed coup by the Bolsheviks and the establishment of a totalitarian regime in the country.[44] Already in 1991, by a resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, October 30 was declared the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repression.[45]

1.4. New Historical Policies of Russia After 1991

Abuladze's highly metaphorical film still vividly reflects the main problematics of memory about Soviet political repression in Russia in the last three decades after the disintegration. Behind the exhumed body (or, precisely saying, figure) of a perpetrator stand various agents, who have been dug him out from historical context for directly opposite reasons: to strengthen his merit or to hold him accountable. The continuous 'cold war' between two narratives of Stalin (and Soviet political repression) opposes not only communities of

[42] "Note by M. Solomentsev in the Central Committee of the CPSU "On the procedure for covering in print the work of the Politburo Commission, resolutions of the plenums of the Supreme Court of the USSR and decisions of the Party Control Committee under the Central Committee of the CPSU on consideration of cases related to the repressions of -40s and early 50s of 01/29/1988," *Alexander Yakovlev Foundation*. https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/66066.

[43] "Sed'moye noyabrya – den' natsional'noy tragedii," [November 7 – the day of national tragedy], *Chas pik*, (November 12, 1990).

[44] The credit of trust has been exhausted: Resolution of the Coordination Council of the Leningrad Popular Front "On the attitude towards the CPSU (following the results of the Congress of Communists of the RSFSR and the XXVIII Congress of the CPSU)," *Smena*. (July 27, 1990).

[45] Resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR "On the establishment of the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repressions" dated 18.10.1991, *Alexander Yakovlev Foundation*. https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/68294.

remembrance, but also one commemorating generation to another. When in Abuladze's movie we see the moral conflict of son and grandson of a dictator (with the suicide of the latter due to his intransigence), in 1990s Russia we notice the widening gap with further generations, who are left to investigate this past and reflect it individually, mainly basing on the collective memory of their families or having a chance to encounter the trauma of Soviet repression by accident.

After the dissolution of the USSR, the memory of Soviet political repression was disseminated and transformed into several state-based historical contexts of former republics. Russia was not an exclusion from those, who turned to history as a source of their post-Soviet national identity. As it comes quite clear from the multi-layered and conveyor nature of repressive policies, not all the countries of the former Soviet bloc have been holding the same commemorative narrative. Stefan Troebst groups those memory cultures into four categories: with anticommunist consensus (Baltic states), with fierce public debates on recent history (Hungary, Poland), countries, where apathy and ambivalence dominate (Bulgaria, Romania), and where communism has not been de-legitimized (Belarus, Moldova).[46] Even though there are still nations, who are indifferent in their attitude to such harmful Soviet past, Russia does not fit into any category. Ekaterina Klimenko claims that Russia's case is specific because it, as she well pointed, "has an image as the USSR's primary legatee and, therefore, is often regarded as the only national entity blamable for the crimes committed in its name and on its territory."[47] In the early 1990s, Russia was in the process of finding its historical roots, which

[46] Lidia Jessin-Jurek, "The rise of an East European community of memory? : on lobbying for the Gulag memory via Brussels," in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives,* ed. Malgorzata Pakier, Joanna Wawrzyniak (Berghahn Books, 2016), 134.
[47] Ekaterina Klimenko, "The Politics of Oblivion and the Practices of Remembrance: Repression, Collective Memory and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia," in *Historical Memory of European Communisms Before and After 1989*, ed. by Stanislav Holubec, Agnieszka Mrozik (New York: Routledge, 2018), 141.

would construct a new lasting identity and would give the justification for Russians to exist as a nation.

The first president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, upon coming to power in 1991, was initially motivated by the idea of breaking with the Soviet past. His desire to support democratic change and a wave of criticism of the Soviet political system resulted in a search for a "new Russian idea" that would become the basis for uniting the people and creating a new Russian identity. He made some significant attempts to support this strategy: he changed the flag to the modern tricolor, returned the imperial coat of arms of the two-headed eagle, proclaimed the 7th of November as the Day of Accord and Reconciliation.[48] However, Yeltsin and the new government, represented by people from Soviet political circles, believed that the new Russian idea was "something to be discovered rather than invented."[49] This approach did not take into account that society was going through a deep identity crisis. People could not simultaneously experience the loss of stability and accept that for 69 years they lived in a criminal regime. A society that had been raised for generations on Soviet ideology could not adequately accept Yeltsin's attempts to revive the historical connection with Imperial Russia.[50] Other initiatives to bury Vladimir Lenin in 1997 and were also painfully perceived by society.[51] The attempts of the new government to repent were often unsuccessful, largely due to the lack of sincerity in the actions of the authorities on the one hand, and the crisis of identity in society on the other. At the same time, the memory of Soviet political repressions no longer had any

[48] Anatoly Khazanov,"Whom to Mourn and Whom to Forget? (Re)constructing Collective Memory in Contemporary Russia." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 9*, no. 2-3 (June-September 2008), 299.
[49] Kathleen Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory in the Yeltsin Era,* (Cornell University Press, 2002), 163.
[50] In 1998, Yeltsin campaigned for the reburial of the remains of the royal family on the 80th anniversary of their execution.
[51] Dmitriy Pinsker, "Boris Yel'tsin nameren "osvobodit' Krasnuyu ploshchad' ot kladbishcha" do 2000 goda," [Boris Yeltsin intends to "free Red Square from the cemetery" by 2000] Itogi 32, no. 65 (August 19, 1997); "Yel'tsin sobirayetsya zakonchit' svoyu politicheskuyu kar'yeru v budushchem godu, khvalit Stepashina i schitayet nuzhnym pokhoronit' Lenina," [Yeltsin is going to end his political career next year, praises Stepashin and considers it necessary to bury Lenin] *Izvestia* (July 5, 1999).

boundaries, and it was in the period from 1991 to 1999 that monuments to the victims of rpressions appeared in large quantities in Russia. However, the diversity of memorial cultures, their search for their own representation made the emergence of a stable (concerted) culture of memory a difficult and long process.

1.5. Back to the "Roots": Veiled Restalinization of 2000s

The memory of the Great Patriotic War was slowly becoming a basis of new Russian identity after 1999, when the new regime of Vladimir Putin emerged. The confrontation of memory about war and the memory about Soviet political repressions began closer to the 2000s when the heroic Soviet past was recognized as a tool for nation-building. The continuity with Soviet history was embedded into the myth of the Great Patriotic War and victory in it, which became a ground for the unification of the nation – the idea unfolded by Yeltsin. Since this war is closely tied to the figure of Stalin, crimes of Stalinism and collective traumas, also related to him, were left behind as elements of undesirable Russian identity.

The processes happening in Russia with memory about political repressions fits in Aleida Assmann's concept of forgetting, where one of the characteristics is the attempt to leave a troubled past and to build a new future.[52] However, it is worth claiming again, that the dominance of the narrative of the heroic past does not exclude the dark pages of Soviet history from Russia's appropriated continuity with the USSR. The problem arising here is the suppression of such a memory culture that uncovers the preceding state's crimes and injustices. This strategy in history-making leaves the possibility for the continuation of state violence. Although this potential threat could be avoided with the "dissemination of victim's public visibility and audibility" that will complicate state authority's continuation of "repressive

[52] Aleida Assmann, "The Transformative Power of Memory" in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives,* ed. by Malgorzata Pakier, Joanna Wawrzyniak (Berghahn Books, 2016), 25.

policy of forgetting and silence."[53] Since both memories included the image of Stalin with strongly opposite connotations (hero and patriot at war from one side and an executor from the other), one memory comes above another. As Koposov notes, the process of acceptance of memory about Soviet repression successfully started developing after the collapse of the USSR, when new Russian politicians were ready to leave the Soviet past behind, but emerged confrontation of memories transformed the whole course and never let the 'unfinished revolution' of changing historical narratives be accomplished.[54] The further ongoing nostalgia for the Soviet past was supported by the state, who aimed to construct a positive national identity on the base of a powerful, developed, and prosperous predecessor, so Russian society started gradually be less critical of its Soviet roots.[55] The rapid developments, industrialization, and most importantly, the victory in the Second World War pretended to be an honored legacy for new Russian identity.

Moving to Assmann's concept of the transformative power of memory, we can see how complex the Russian practices of integrating in the historical narrative and memory the acts of Soviet political repression. One of the factors of change is the closeness or openness of historical archives (sources). She argues that personal memory remains restricted if it is not linked to historical sources, thus the closing or opening of historical archives is an important mechanism of transformation. When historical documents are publicly recognized and accessible, national memory is able to change. In Russia, the archives of KGB (Committee of State Security) were partly open in October 1991 under the law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression", according to which rehabilitated citizens and their relatives for the first time received the right to familiarize themselves with the materials of criminal and administrative cases initiated against them during the Soviet period and to receive copies of

[53] Aleida Assmann, "The Transformative Power of Memory," 31.
[54] Nikolai Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*, 236.
[55] Ibid, 238.

those documents. Still, the access to information was intentionally limited as pages in the folders were stapled together and closed for examination.[56] Soon after, Russian President Boris Yeltsin protracted the declassifying the archival documents, but this campaign resulted in the decree of 2014 when president Putin extended the secrecy status of archives until 2044.[57]

Another factor is the impact of media. Assmann claims that books or films can stimulate and carry a public discussion in society. In this case, coming back to the last years of the USSR, such a level of publicity and stimulation for social debate was reached by Abuladze and Goldovskaya, whom I mentioned earlier. Russian commemorative culture of the repressed for a long time was dominated by the practices of 'soft' remembering, which is the umbrella term for all the actions of remembrance except monumental ('solid') representation.[58] This tendency can be explained by the long-lasting struggle for the first monuments to the victims of repression during the dissident movement times and Perestroika when the only possibility to effectively reach the public discussion was the textual (also verbal) or pictorial form (periodicals, articles, poems, art exhibitions, meetings, educational events). Besides the monuments themselves that started rapidly coming up after 1991, another symbolic physical incarnation of the Soviet political repression was, obviously, the former camps and shooting ranges near them (future memorial cemeteries), However, leaving the fact that the information about the majority of them was inaccessible, to organize regular visits of citizens to these places was impossible.

Another illustrative example of a turning point in historical policies was the process of restoring the monuments that started in the late 1980s. After the successful fight of activists for

[56] Cathy Frierson, "Russia's Law 'On Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression': 1991-2011," 40.
[57] "How Different Countries Opened the KGB Archives," *TASS*, accessed December 4, 2020, https://tass.ru/info/5936863.
[58] Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018), 226.

the demolishing of the perpetrators' names and monuments in the Russian cities during Perestroika's last years, newly emerged communist circles of the 1990s appealed to restore them. The notable case is the public claim to bring back the statue of Felix Dzerzhinskiy, an active participant in the repressive acts of the NKVD, to the Lubyanka square. First article discussing this issue appeared in 1998 in a Russian newspaper.[59] Later in 2002, the mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov, who actually supervised the removal of the statue in 1991, proposed to return Dzerzhinsky to the square.[60] Subconsciously or not subconsciously, the mayor, during a meeting of the town planning council, made a reservation that such an action "does not mean a return to the past." This initiative was not supported by the government due to serious political and social consequences. But if the restoration of the statue of Dzerzhinsky cannot be considered an act of returning to the past, then this very idea can rightfully be recognized as an indicator of abrupt changes in the general political and historical climate of the country.

These proposals were not accepted by both authorities and society. Consequently, they were also blocked by severe critics of human rights groups, Memorial activists, and other organizations for the rights of the repressed and their families.[61] However, the movement still exists and continues its activities through the official site dedicated to the Dzerzhinskiy statue. As one of the supporters of such an idea, Vladimir Bortko, First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Culture well establishes, "it is useless to fight the monuments, especially since they always return to their places."[62] Some monuments do return since representatives of political and social communities are interested in and involved into the memory politics and

[59] Pust' vernetsia "zhelezniy Felix"!" [Let 'Iron Felix' return!], *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, (December 5, 1998).
[60] "Yuriy Luzhkov predlagayet vernut' Dzerzhinskogo na Lubyanku," [Yuri Luzhkov proposes to return Dzerzhinsky to Lubyanka] *Lenta.ru*, September 13, 2002, https://lenta.ru/news/2002/09/13/felix/.
[61] "Narod protiv Feliksa Dzerzhinskogo i Yuriya Luzhkova," [The people against Felix Dzerzhinsky and Yuri Luzhkov] *Kommersant*, September 17, 2002, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/341339.
[62] Ibid.

nation-building. They are constantly changing the narratives and looking for the justification to exist in the events of the past. In Russia, the critics towards the Soviet past, especially Stalinism, were curtailed soon after the successful revision of the past in 1988-1993. Bortko's words could serve as a thoughtful assertion, but he continues: "in Paris, on the same square, there is a monument to Robespierre and the innocent murdered Louis. And it's okay, they exist [together]."[63] The context of one memory opposing the other comes up naturally in his speech, what proves that the historical narrative about the mass repression is being intentionally suppressed behind the chirm of the 'right to remember'. Another supporter of the movement, Zakhar Prilepin, co-chairman of the party "Fair Russia - for Truth!" perplexedly says: "[One may ask] What about those who honor the memory of those killed in bloody strife? But the Solovetsky stone is nearby. And this closeness - the Dzerzhinsky and Solovetsky stones - symbolizes the fact that all the lessons have been taken into account."[64]

These processes were also accompanied by other events and activities, which attracted the public's attention to the figure of Stalin, and to consequently affect the social reflections on the narratives of Stalinism. Among those actions, were attempts to remind about Stalinist crimes and to tie them closely to the personality of a dictator. In 2003 the Saint-Petersburg Museum of the Political History of Russia held the exhibition "Comrade Stalin, thank you…", which uncovered the repressive politics of the regime by providing official documents, NKVD reports, written denunciations, prisoners' personal belongings, etc. The same museum organized another exhibition "Stalin…" in 2009 as a part of the project "Images of Soviet leaders. Reality. Utopia. Criticism." It was less accusive and harsh, but it still diluted the positive image of Stalin by including the dark side of his biography as a politician and statesman. A similar contrast-based exposition "Stalin: Man, and Symbol" was presented at the

[63] "Vernem pamyatnik Dzerzhinskomu na Lubyanku" [Lets return the Dzerzhinsky's monument back to the Lubyanka Square] *Project Pamyatnik Dzerzhinkomu* https://www.памятникдзержинскому.рф
[64] Ibid.

Moscow Museum of the Contemporary History of Russia. The idea was to let two Stalins look at each other: the honored Soviet leader and the repressive dictator. The concept unavoidably refers to Anna Akhmatova's expression about two Russias (the imprisoned and the imprisoning one), who would once look at each other's face to account the past.[65] Unfortunately, one of the Russia has not yet received a deserved belated repentance.

The times changed, and with the development of a common historical narrative, the state started to limit or prevent the intervention of 'hostile' interpretations of the past. This was evident when Arnando Ianucci's film "The Death of Stalin", released in 2017, when it was deprived of distribution license for screenings in Russian cinemas. The comedy angered government officials and was banned as "planned provocation", western "anti-Russian information war" and an attempt to vilify Russian history.[66] Simultaneously, the institutions which are responsible for commemoration and remembrance of the repression are usually limited by the level of involvement of 'new bystanders' or young researchers. In September 2019 I attended the closed screening of a historical documentary by French director Nicolas Miletitch called "Za uspekh nashego beznadezhnogo dela" (To the Success of Our Hopeless Case).[67] The small room of the Memorial branch in Saint-Petersburg had almost no young people, and the afterward discussion on the film was blocked by the elderly ex-dissidents, who intensively put forward their own accepted historical narrative. Although the organizers' original idea about private screenings across the country was precisely to stimulate public

[65] Lidia Chukovskaia, *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi*, [Notes about Anna Akhmatova] (Moscow: Soglasie, 1997), 41.
[66] Shaun Walker, "In Russia, nobody's laughing at Iannucci's The Death of Stalin," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/14/in-russia-nobodys-laughing-at-armando-iannucci-death-of-stalin; Marc Bennetts, "Russia considers ban on Armando Iannucci's film The Death of Stalin," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/20/russia-considers-ban-armando-iannucci-film-death-of-stalin; "The Public Council under the Ministry of Culture wants to watch the film "Death of Stalin" in advance," *Govorit Moskva*, accessed December 4, 2020, https://govoritmoskva.ru/news/134987/.
[67] The title of the film refers to the popular toast among dissidents of 1960-80s, when they gathered in the secret apartments for a discussion and a drink. The documentary tells a story of Soviet dissidents, who fought for human rights under the totalitarian regime and played their role in the historical changes of Perestroika.

dialogue on the topics of the Gulag and repression, it was uncomfortable for young generations to express their point of view. The collective memory about the Soviet repression in a certain way is being enclosed in the frames of what allowed and what is not allowed to transmit to the public by an expert opinion of the witnesses.

In the last 20 years, the positive attitude to Stalin was slowly increasing. The possible reasons for these changes are the intensive and grandiose preparations to celebrate the 60-, 65- and 70-year anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War in 2005, 2010, and 2015. This phenomenon had a long tradition behind its back. In the late 2000s memory laws became an instrument of politics of memory, which helped to strengthen the myth of Great Patriotic War.[68] Many researchers link this process with Vladimir Putin, who seems to be the main initiator of such a memory policy. When Koposov claims that Russia became a 'past dependent' country with Putin, Klimenko gives an interesting comparison of Putin and Medvedev during their presidentship on the illustrative example of their authorial responsibility to speak with the nation on such heated topic of Soviet repression. She admits that Medvedev's speech on the official Memorial Day of the Victims of Repression (October 30, 2009) was the first and only, for now, made by a president. In his speech, he raised the need to restore historical justice and preserve the historical memory about Soviet political repression. Although Medvedev has called for an acceptance of the "past as it was," he has retained the official rhetoric of Stalin's merit as opposed to his repressive policies.[69]

What is happening is what Memorial historian Irina Scherbakova called 'veiled re-stalinisation' or 'creeping re-stalinisation'.[70] The appeal to 'useful' biographical facts of

[68] Nikolai Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*, 238.
[69] "Pamyat' o natsional'nykh tragediyakh tak zhe svyashchenna, kak pamyat' o pobedakh," [The memory of national tragedies is as sacred as the memory of victories] *President Rossii*, October 30, 2009, http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/5862.
[70] "Chto deti znayut o voyne?" [What do children know about the war?] *Echo of Moscow*, May 7, 2006, http://a-ustjugov.narod.ru/pressa/detiovoine.html.

perpetrators, the rationalization of the attempts to erect monuments to them, the evocation of desired past is slowly but deliberately blurring attention to certain historical narratives, occupying the public historical discourse with 'convenient' events of the past. The washing out of historical events and facts greatly reduces the ability of the bearers of the memorial culture about the victims of repression to break through the ceiling of the official memorial policy. This does not necessarily mean that the visibility of these memory agents is actively downgraded. This means that by ignoring them and minimally interacting with them, the state forces them to naturally reduce their activity due to the lack of material and political support. Social contribution and attention of those who are not indifferent allows some memorials to exist or even to be established, but these rates cannot be compared with the rates of state reproduction of 'suitable' historical memory in the public space.

From the factors of change, mentioned above, develops the generational memory, which implies the embodiment of memory to be transmitted from one generation to another, causing inter-generational debates for continuous changes in the course of memory. It should be rethought by each generation and perceived differently to raise further problematic questions. In Russia, the culture of memory about Soviet repression has always been incomplete, because there was no official full-fledged recognition of such a traumatic past. Following generations are left to investigate this past and reflect on it individually, mostly based on the collective memory of their families or by having a chance to comprehend the negative parts of historical narrative accidentally.

The image of Stalin, like any significant historical character, always contains a combination of positive and negative assessments. And this is not an invented phenomenon, it is a stable tradition which was established in 1956. Though Russian dominant historical narrative praises Stalin, repression, and executions remain inherent characteristics of his

personality. Only a small number of Russians are ready to completely deny these facts. However, the balance of positive and negative evaluation is constantly changing. Under the influence of political events and propaganda, the negative characteristics of the image of Stalin gradually recede into the background. The idea of Stalin as a victorious commander in the Great Patriotic War and a strong leader, who managed to restore order in the country, is being put forward. An important source of revaluation of Stalin in public opinion is the policy of the authorities. This does not mean that state authorities deliberately promote the image of a dictator "from top to bottom". Rather, it is a by-product of the government's use of Victory in the Great Patriotic War to maintain its own legitimacy.

For thirty years, we see how the situation is changing. The revolution as the main constitutive event of the Soviet regime went away along with the collapse of the USSR. And in its place comes Victory in the Great Patriotic War as a symbol of triumph, as the moral justification of Russia in the world and its right for a valuable opinion on an international level. War is becoming more mythologized and appropriated by the political authorities. And this strengthens its role in the regime's legitimacy.

> This characterizes the official propaganda rather than the real mood of the people. Russians traditionally like stable periods, and Stalin, according to mythology, brought the country out of ruin, made a great power out of a poor peasant country, and the price of human life for the respondents is not so important.[71]

In the early 1990s, the Russian society started to believe that it is necessary to talk more about the Great Terror and political repression, but the lack of authorities who could go to the public or federal channels and give an assessment to this leads to the fact that people do not

[71] Vladimir Dergachov, "Lyubov rossiyan k stalinu dostigla istoricheskogo maksimuma za 16 let," [Russians' love for Stalin reached a historic high in 16 years] *RBK*, February 15, 2017,http://www.rbc.ru/politics/15/02/2017/58a33b919a79472a55281e2a.

know how to react. The revolution in minds ended soon after it started. The Russian politicians of the 1990s, the majority of whom were the children of the Brezhnev era of curtailed destalinization, were not ready for the changes. Raised in the Soviet Union with concrete ideology and state-proclaimed historical narrative, they continued the well-assimilated template of state-building but under a different name. Russian society agrees that Stalinism and unfolded Soviet repression were an inexcusable state crime against humanity, but a very small number are in favor of declaring Stalin's regime criminal.

Russia developed as a successor state, whose right to exist was built on continuity with the USSR. The duality of Stalinist politics, which brought to Russian history both honored victory and mass repression, severely complicated the memorial culture related to the Soviet legacy. If other former Soviet republics are mostly indifferent or critical to their communist past, the memory of suffering during the political repression remains as a strong argument to support the whole narrative about Soviet occupation. The Russian politicians never envisioned such an option. However, the peculiarities of the Russian case could lead to the development of a particular state-produced and accepted memorial culture, which would allow the commemoration of victims of war and of repressions simultaneously.

CHAPTER 2. Levashovo as a Memorial Cemetery

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the issues of emergence of Levashovo memorial cemetery and the history of its gradual development to become a place of collective remembrance for the victims of Soviet political repression in the Leningrad area. In order to better understand the peculiarity and significance of this place for the general narrative of the post-Soviet memory about repressions, I reveal the historical, political, and social contexts of the emergence of the memorial cemetery in Levashovo. Several events and facts have influenced the current appearance of the former burial ground, which over the past thirty years has become a memorial place of concentration for multiple communities. Through analyzing the individuals and communities of different memorial culture with their commemorative practices in Levashovo, I emphasize the process of organic interaction of many collectives of memory presented there. The uncertain Russian memory politics from the recent decades has dramatically changed the social perception on the problem of the memory of Soviet political repressions and ruled out the prospect of creating an integral narrative for this memory. During the last 30 years, the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery tended to become a direct example of such a memory based on common consent.

2.1. Levashovo Gains Importance

Soon after Valentin Muravskiy's searching group revealed the former shooting range in 1988, the further investigation of Levashovo began. Initially, the volunteers struggled to receive a confirmation that the place was the local KGB's property and that it was used as a collective grave for executed prisoners. Since the Levashovo was discovered, KGB was still in function as the authorized Soviet state security body and could not discredit itself by issuing such a document. In the beginning, before the dissolution of the USSR, people could neither walk through the cemetery without an escort of KGB officers, nor privately get acquainted with

the personal files of the detained relatives. The policy of *glasnost* from one side and the fear to discredit the state's power from the other created such a complex and ambiguous situation. Although, as Muravskiy remembers, the first indirect confirmation was received in 1988 from Head of the Department of the KGB of the USSR for the Leningrad Region, Anatoly Kurkov, who would later actively contribute to obtaining archival evidence.[72]

The first visit to Levashovo was arranged by Kurkov, and the Deputy Head of the Leningrad Branch of the State Security Committee,[73] Vladimir Bleer for the commission which included members of the searching group 'Poisk'. Theoretically, it was crucial that the state security bodies did not interfere with the opening of Levashovo, but ironically, they, in fact, contributed to it. Yet, as Muravsky recalls, the restrictions were still coming from the Smolny[74], which for a long time did not give permission to publish the results of the investigation. For some time, entrance into the cemetery was allowed only in exceptional cases, for members of the commission and various specialists:

> We made lists of who will go, when we go. But we at least determined where these graves are, where these ditches are. And Oleinikov, who also studied by this, he determined with his instruments where these ditches were.[75]

In April 1989 Kurkov wrote to the USSR State Security Committee an inquiry to provide truthful information about the secured cemetery near the railway station of Levashovo.

[72] "Ya iskal mogilu otsa, a nashel 40 tyisyach mogil," [I was looking for the father's grave, but found 40 thousand graves] Interview with Valentin Muravskiy. *Grad Petrov* Radio Station, https://www.grad-petrov.ru/broadcast/muravskiy_levashovo/.
[73] The branch located in the building on Liteiny prospect, 4, which among local was called 'the Big House' - a symbol of terror and repression in Leningrad.
[74] This is the conventionally designated government of St. Petersburg, which is located in the building of the Smolny Institute.
[75] "Ya iskal mogilu otsa, a nashel 40 tyisyach mogil."

He stressed the need for KGB's main representative to speak out publicly about the discovered cemetery:

> There is an opinion about the urgent need to make the above information about the cemetery public...We believe that in the statement for the press it is necessary to name the place of burial, as well as information on the number of those buried.[76]

Shortly thereafter, his report on the discovery of Levashovo was published in the newspaper., Kurkov's article provides information on the location and number of burials, the size of the field, the approximate number of victims buried, as well as short statistics on the executed convicts.[77] In this document, he states that as a result of archival work and analysis of documents, he has reason to believe that the graves in the Levashovo area is the only reliably known burial place of the repressed in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.[78] According to Muravsky's recollections, such "reliable" sources were the testimonies of machinists in 1960s, who took the bodies of those killed to the pits.[79] With these conversations, it was possible to create a rough schematic drawing with numerous burials (Figure 1).

[76] "To The State Security Committee of the USSR,"
[77] "Pismo nachalnika upravleniya KGB po Leningradskoy oblasti," [A message from the head of the KGB Directorate for the Leningrad Region] in *Leningradskaya Panorama*, no. 10, 1989. P. 8-9.
[78] Ibid.
[79] "Ya iskal mogilu otsa, a nashel 40 tyisyach mogil,"

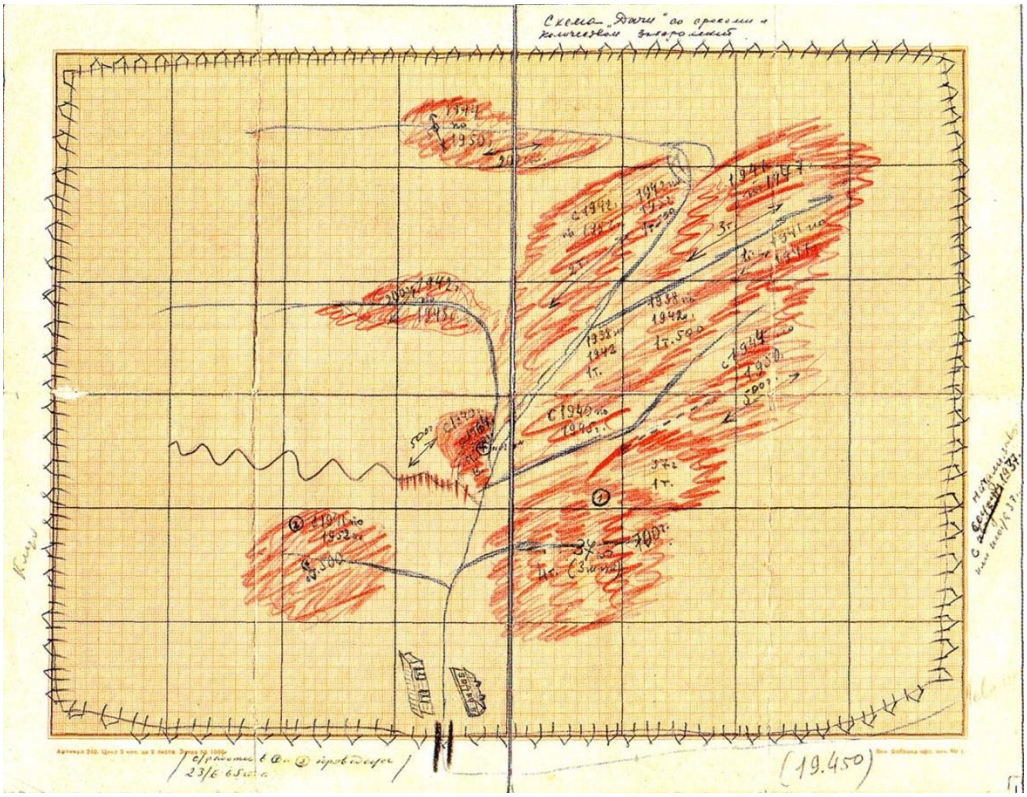

Figure 1. *Scheme of the "dacha" (secret cemetery) of the NKVD in Levashovo. Leningrad. 1965. Recorded burials are from 1937 to 1964.* From the Archives of the FSB Directorate for St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region. https://lev.mapofmemory.org

After a long correspondence with governmental structures, the Levashovo burial finally became open for visitors. On April 14, 1990, the relatives of the executed visited Levashovo for the first time. Initially, visiting the cemetery was possible only on dates agreed with the KGB and by holding special passes, but later the access to the territory for individuals was facilitated. Since the cemetery looked like a forest island, it was difficult to navigate around. Therefore, the issues of landscaping were a priority for the volunteers (Figure 2, Figure 3). Muravskiy remembers the first attempts to transform and organize the territory of the cemetery:

> We put up the pegs and stretched out the twine. There were huge trees at this place, and at first, we wanted to make it so that there was some kind of graves, to mark this place, but for this, it

would be necessary to cut down the trees. We have given up on this. And now it is a symbolic cemetery: under each tree, there are someone's relatives, parents.[80]

Figure 2. *The view of Levashovo in 1989.* Digital Archive of Iofe Foundation http://arch.iofe.center/showObject/61744991

[80] "Ya iskal mogilu otsa, a nashel 40 tyisyach mogil."

Figure 3. *The view of Levashovo in 1989 (Valentin Muravskiy)*. Digital Archive of Iofe Foundation http://arch.iofe.center/showObject/61744991

L. Lukina, a journalist, remembers her first impressions after entering the Levashovo cemetery:

> There are no grave crosses either, but I suddenly felt creepy, and the legs are filled with lead. Passing here, one could inevitably step on an invisible, hidden grave, on human bones, because no one could know for sure where those huge pits were dumped into which countless corpses fell.[81] (Figure 4, Figure 5)

[81] "Za zelyonym zaborom s glukhimi vorotami: mesto zakhoroneniya zhertv stalinskikh repressiy okolo zheleznodorozhnoy stantsii Levashovo priznali memorialnim kladbischem," [Behind a Fence with Blind Gates: The Burial Place of Victims of Stalinist Repressions Near the Levashovo Railway Station is Recognized as a Memorial Cemetery] *Vecherniy Leningrad* no. 171 (July 1989), 1.

Figure 4. *First visitors of the cemetery in 1989*. The Center for Recovered Names of the National Library of Russia, http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo

Figure 5. *First visitors of the cemetery in 1989*. The Center for Recovered Names of the National Library of Russia, http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo

On July 18, 1989, the Executive Committee of the Leningrad City Council adopted decision No. 544 "On the improvement of the burial place of victims of repressions of the 30-40s and early 50s," according to which the Levashovo was recognized as a memorial cemetery of victims of political repression.[82] At this time, the Main Department of Architecture and Urban Planning was instructed to develop a project for the planning of the territory. And in 1990, the Leningrad Research Institute was entrusted with the development of a project for the improvement of the cemetery.[83] However, both tasks were not fully completed due to lack of funding. Additionally, specially organized by the Russian Research Geological Institute of A.P. Karpinsky the study of the cemetery territory to establish the boundaries of multiple burials was also not completed, and the results of the work were never published. Probably, precisely because these initiatives and projects were not fully implemented, the collective graves at the cemetery remained untouched, and the dead bodies were not identified.

The tasks of spatial organization of the cemetery were taken by Memorial activists and civil volunteers, who cleaned and ennobles the territory, trampled paths and took care of the new memorials (Figure 6, Figure 7). On October 30, 1993, in the former guardhouse, was opened an exposition about the Great Terror, which was prepared by Luciya Bartashevich, member of the Association of Victims of Unjustified Repression. At the same time, the Guest Book appeared there, where visitors began to leave their comments.

[82] "Levashovskaya pustosh: memorialy I memorialniye znaki," [Levashovo Wasteland: Memorials and Memorial signs] *Map of Memory Project* https://lev.mapofmemory.org
[83] Ibid.

Figure 6. Workers of a cemetery planting flowers in a flower bed (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Figure 7. View of a part of the memorial to the victims of political repression "Levashovskaya Wasteland". Architect A.G. Lelyakov, artist I.G. Uralov (October 1997). Author: Catherine Merridale. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

2.2. The Cemetery Gets Official Recognition

The *Levashovskaya Pustosh* (Levashovo Wasteland) received legal status as a memorial in 1996 by the order of the mayor of St. Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak.[84] It is important to note that less than a year earlier, Sobchak had initiated the installation of the "Moloch of Totalitarianism" in front of the Levashovo's entrance, a sculpture of a human body compressed under the pressure of totalitarian machine, to perpetuate the memory of the victims of repression (Figure 8, Figure 9).[85] However, this project set a heated debate among citizens, who had dual perspectives on whether this state created memorial should be located in such a sacred place. As a consequence, the monument was erected in front of the entrance to the cemetery. At the opening of the monument, one of the creators of the Leningrad branch of Memorial, Valentin Iofe, supported in his speech the ambivalent attitude of people towards the monument. He also proposed to perform a symbolic act: "Now we will all turn our backs on this Moloch and go to the place where people dear to our hearts lie, and we will carry flowers to them as a gift of our memory ..."[86] Since the memory about the victims of Soviet political repression had just started to look for its material embodiment in the first post-Soviet years, it had too many problematic issues to resolve. The question of whom to blame was especially tricky since the answer was only an abstract image of the state, thus, the idea of Sobchak, a representative of local authorities, was received with some condemnation.

[84] Rasporyazheniye Mera Sankt-Peterburga ot 19.02.96 № 138-r "O sozdanii memoriala Levashovskoy pustoshi v pamyat' o zhertvakh politicheskikh repressiy v Sankt-Peterburge" [Order of the Mayor of St. Petersburg dated 02.19.96 No. 138-r "On the creation of the Levashovo Wasteland memorial in memory of the victims of political repression in St. Petersburg."]

[85] Rasporyazheniye Mera Sankt-Peterburga ot 06.05.95. nomer 465-r. "Ob ustanovke monumental'no-dekorativnoy skul'pturnoy kompozitsii« Molokh totalitarizma." [Order of the Mayor of St. Petersburg dated 06.05.95. number 465-r. "On the installation of the monumental and decorative sculptural composition" Moloch of totalitarianism."]

[86] "Moloch of Totalitarism," *speech of V. Iofe*, (May 15, 1996), 2.

Figure 8. Opening of the monument "Moloch of Totalitarianism" - one of the monuments of the memorial to the victims of political repression in the Levashovo wasteland. Architectures: N.P. Galitskaya, V.A.Gambarov (May 1996). Author: Sergey Smolsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Figure 9. Anatoly Sobchak gives a speech at the opening of the monument “Moloch of Totalitarism.” (May 1996) Author: Sergey Smolsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Soon after the administration of St. Petersburg took an active part in the activities of the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery in 1996, the Committee for Economics and Finance was instructed to allocate 100 million rubles a month from the fund of unforeseen expenses of the mayor for the improvement of the territory of the cemetery.[87] This helped to tidy up the walkways for visitors and to equip the entrance. However, very soon in the same year, funding stopped. Obviously, such changes took place because A. Sobchak lost the elections and ceased to hold the post of mayor of St. Petersburg.[88] After that, the local authorities were not at all interested in Levashovo. Notably that the First Deputy Mayor of Saint-Petersburg was Vladimir Putin, the future Russian president, who was familiar with all the documentation regarding Levashovo. The subsequent memorialization of the cemetery continued with the support of the material resources of public organizations and individuals.

In 2000, the Administration of St. Petersburg approved a regulation on the Levashovo memorial cemetery, which formulated the basic principles of "memorial arrangement, improvement and maintenance of the cemetery as an official place of honoring, laying wreaths and carrying out other activities to perpetuate the memory of victims of political repression ".[89] The authorities' attention returned to Levashovo, but with a completely different purpose. Now, the spatial organization of the cemetery and the creation of memorials on its territory has become strictly regulated by a legal document. On October 30 the same year the city officials were supposed to take part in the mourning ceremonies to mark the day of remembrance for the victims of repressions at the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery.

[87] Rasporyazheniye Mera Sankt-Peterburga ot 19.02.96 № 138-r "O sozdanii memoriala Levashovskoy pustoshi." [Order of the Mayor of St. Petersburg dated 02.19.96 No. 138-r "On the creation of the Levashovo Wasteland memorial."]

[88] Viktor Rezunkov, "Why did Sobchak lose?" *Radio Liberty* (February 2016) https://www.svoboda.org/a/27534956.html

[89] "Prikaz Komiteta potrebitel'skogo rynka Administratsii Sankt-Peterburga ot 17.01.2000 №2 "O Levashovskom memorial'nom kladbishche (Levashovskaya pustosh')." [Order of the Consumer Market Committee of the Administration of St. Petersburg dated 01.17.2000 No.2 "On the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery (Levashovskaya Pustosh)."]

However, the cemetery did not receive much attention from Russian politicians after that. As journalist from Saint-Petersburg Galina Stolyarova recalls, she experienced a great sense of shame in June 2007 at the unveiling of the monument to a thousand Italians killed in the Gulag. The official person at the ceremony was Piero Fassino, the head of the Italy's Left Democrats, but the vice-governor of Saint-Petersburg, who had promised to come, did not appear. Analyzing the situation, she claims:

> In his [Putin's] view, an apology is a sign of weakness. The Soviet Union was a strong state, and it never apologized for what it did. And for that reason, like his predecessors, Putin has offered no apologies to the foreign victims of Stalin's crimes.[90]

Clearly, the reason for the absence of Russian officials in Levashovo and other similar memorial cemeteries is the ideology, which constructs a concrete scenario for what should be remembered. There is no place for memory about Soviet political repression in the public discourse. Unreadiness to symbolically repent in front of various national communities, who keep erecting memorial at Levashovo, reflects the unwillingness or indifference of the Russian authorities to accept the past, using the Medvedev's expression, "as it was."

In 2015, the Levashovo Wasteland Memorial Cemetery was included in the register of cultural heritage sites as an object of cultural heritage of regional significance.[91] And according to statistics of 2017, more than 1300 personal memorial signs and symbolic gravestones (cenotaphs) installed by the relatives of the repressed were recorded at the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery. In addition, the territory includes 40 collective monuments created with funds from local activist organizations and national communities. The cemetery also contains

[90] Galina Stolyarova, "Stalin's Victims: A Missing Memorial". *Transitions Online*, July 24, 2007, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=151937, 1.

[91] "Rasporyazheniye Komiteta gosudarstvennogo kontrolya, ispol'zovaniya i okhrany pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury Pravitel'stva Sankt-Peterburga № 10-605 ot 22 dekabrya 2015 goda." [Order of the Committee for State Control, Use and Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments of the Government of St. Petersburg No. 10-605 dated December 22, 2015] https://www.gov.spb.ru/law/?d&nd=537986553&nh=1

more than 25 symbolic monuments dedicated to various social groups of Soviet society and their representatives who suffered in the result of Soviet repressive campaigns.

The "Poisk" memorial group, which included Gennady Filippov, Mikhail Pushnitsky, Sergei Roshchin, Leonid Lemberik and Viktor Khromenkov, began work again in 1997.[92] During the study of the territory of the Kovalevsky Forest near St. Petersburg, in the summer of 2001, shooting pits with human remains were discovered. In 2001 Memorial members exhumed the bodies to rebury them and put already familiar commemorative sign – a stone. In 2009-10, the Memorial community decided to create a Memorial Park with a museum complex at the burial site. This idea was supported by the President of the Union of Russian Museums, Mikhail Piotrovsky, and the application was sent to the reception of President Medvedev.[93] However, in the course of many years of bureaucratic correspondence with various government organizations, the project remained only on paper. Memorial services, excursions and care of the cemetery are still carried out with social support of relatives and ordinary sympathizers.[94] The case of the Kovalevsky Forest can be considered a representation of Russian historical politics, which in the first decade of the 21st century actively developed a "cautious" indifference to undesirable events of the past.

The case of another shooting polygon with mass graves in Sandormokh, Karelia became a truly indicative incident to the issue of the changing historical policy in Russia. The burial was found in 1997 and officially recognized as a burial ground for victims of political repression and a cultural heritage site in 2000.[95] The memorial site started developing in the same way as Levashovo, which by this time underwent many changes. In the 20 years of its

[92] Alexander Margolis, Peterburg: *Istoria i sovremennost'. Izbranniye ocherki,* [Petersburg: History and Modernity '. Selected Essays] (Tsentrpoligraf, 2014), 197.
[93] Ibid, 198.
[94] "Memorialnoe kladbische Kovalevskiy les," [Memorial cemetery Kovalevsky forest] *Nekropol terrora i gulaga*, https://mapofmemory.org/47-01
[95] Irina Flige, Sandormokh: Dramaturgiia smyslov, [Sandormoh: Dramaturgy of Meanings] (SPb: Nestor-Istoriia, 2019). 81-87.

reveal to the public, Sandormokh became a place for many collective monuments, which interestingly are mostly national: to Estonians (2007), Lithuanians (2007), Poles (2007), Chechens (2011), Germans (2012), Moldavians (2015), Georgians (2016), Azerbaijanians (2017). In 2016 the Russian Military-Historical Society (RMHS) launched a campaign to substitute the historical narrative of Sandormokh,[96] claiming that Soviet soldiers who were shot by the Finns in 1941-44 were buried in these pits.[97] A year before the Memorial was recognized a foreign agent and later, a historian of Memorial branch in Karelia Yuri Dmitriev was arrested in a trumped-up case.[98] The RMHS lead by the Russian Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, held several expeditions to the cemetery to find evidence of Finnish executions of Soviet soldiers.[99] There is still no archival or official proof that Sandormokh can be a mass grave of the Soviets. During the public discussion on the processes happened in Karelia, society, activists, media and experts remembered other mass graves like Katyn and Mednoye where the same campaigns of de-memorialization took place earlier.[100]

Levashovo memorial cemetery is one of the first places that was opened to the public. It was this socially appropriated burial ground that set the trend towards spatial planning of former execution pits as a special type of memorial cemetery for commemorating victims of

[96] In 2016 on the territory of the cemetery appeared a memorial veiled under the form of an Orthodox worship cross with inscription “To the Russian people innocently killed in the Sandarmokh tract." This event was a sign of changes.

[97] For the first time this idea was expressed by a member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation G. Solodyannikov in 1997.

[98] “Glavu karel'skogo «Memoriala» arestovali za snimok docheri i vnuchki v domashnem komp'yutere,” [The head of the Karelian "Memorial" was arrested for taking a picture of his daughter and granddaughter in his home computer] *Znak*, December 15, 2016, https://www.znak.com/2016-12-15/glavu_karelskogo_memoriala_arestovali_za_snimok_docheri_i_vnuchki_v_domashnem_kompyutere; “Sud arestoval istorika Yuriya Dmitriyeva po novomu ugolovnomu delu,” [The court arrested the historian Yuri Dmitriev in a new criminal case], *BBC News*, June 28, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-44641337.

[99] Flige, “Sandormokh,” 125-127; Daniil Kotsyubinsky,“Sandarmokh-2018: eksgumatsiya pamyati,” [Sandarmokh-2018: exhumation of memory] Fontanka, August 31, 2018, https://www.fontanka.ru/2018/08/31/048/, Vitaly Chervonenko, “Igry pamyati: kak Sandormokh mozhet prevratitsya v voenniy memorial,” [Memory games: how Sandormoch can be turned into a war memorial] BBC News Ukraine, September 7, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-russian-45448464.amp.

[100] Konstantin Konoplyanko, “Korennoy perelom v pamyati Kak Kreml' vdokhnovlyayetsya sovetskimi uchebnikami istorii,” [A radical change in memory: How the Kremlin is inspired by Soviet history textbooks] *Novaya Gazeta*, June 21, 2020, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/06/21/85949-korennoy-perelom-v-pamyati.

repression. It is significant that political changes and propagandistic ideological campaigns carried out by authorities. Therefore, the activists, relatives and friends of the repressed and other representatives of an unlimited number of memorial cultures were able to accept the changes under the influence of which they gave Levashovo the look it has today. This is important because it was society that, by investing in certain ideas and views on the memory of Soviet political repressions, formed a long-waited "man-made" common "monument" to the victims of repressions.

2.3. Mourning Communities at Levashovo

The main common annual event for perpetuation of the repressed is the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression, which takes place in Russia on October 30 (Figure 10). The first religious (exclusively Orthodox) services took place in 1989 and 1990 at the intersection of the cemetery paths where Memorial activists and representatives of other human rights group put the memorial stone (traditionally with the Solovetsky stone in Moscow and St. Petersburg).[101] (Figure 11, Figure 12)

[101] "Levasovo Memorial Cemetery," *A Booklet*, (Press of the National Library of Russia, 2013), 5-6.

Figure 10. *The priest Alexander Ranne is holding one of the first memorial services in Levashovo.* (1990), Levashovo: Pamyatniki i pamyatniye znaki, https://lev.mapofmemory.org

Figure 11. A visitor to the cemetery lays flowers at the memorial stone (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Figure 12. Visitors to the cemetery at the memorial stone (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Together with memorial stone other commemorative signs started to appear at the cemetery. Most of them were fixed on a tree: an Orthodox cross or ribbons (Figure 13), photographs with inscriptions (Figure 14, Figure 15) left by the relatives of the repressed. The improvised

"graves" were also created in the form of metal plaques with portraits, slabs on the ground, crosses, stuck in the earth and many other symbols of commemoration.[102]

Figure 13. View of a memorial cross on one of the trees in the cemetery (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

[102] Alexander Margolis, Nekropoli terror ana territorii Sankt-Peterburga I Leningradskoy oblasti," [Necropolis of terror on the territory of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region] *Revue des etudes slaves 86*, no. 1/2 (2015), 187.

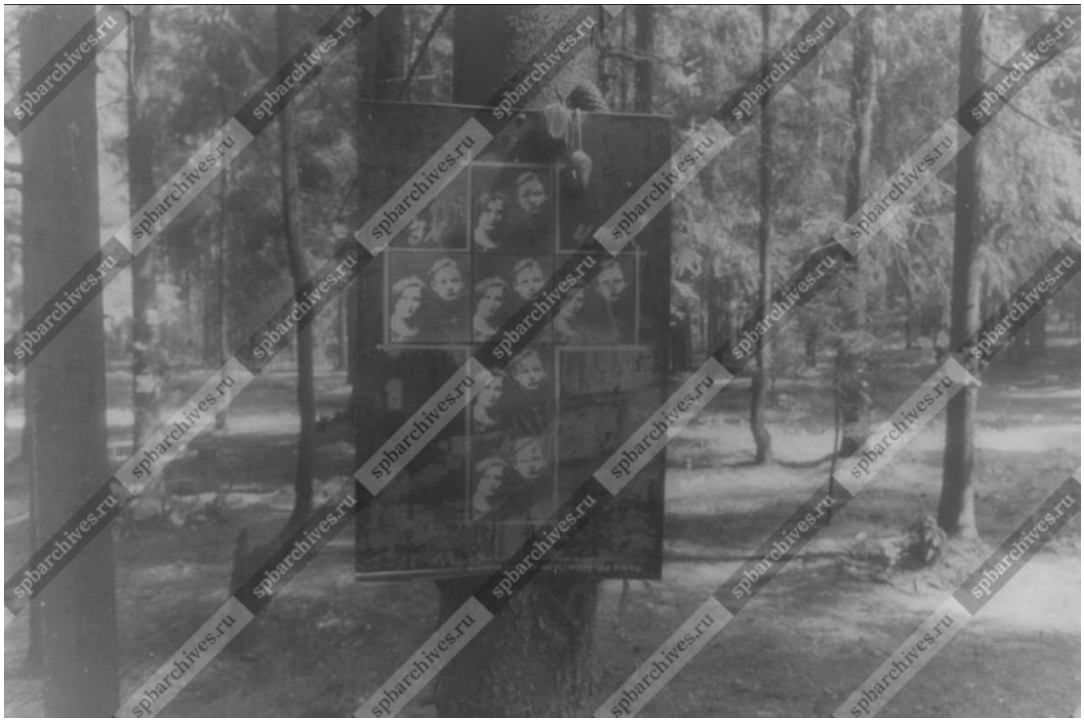

Figure 14. View of a memorial plaque with the names of those buried on one of the trees in the cemetery (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Figure 15. View of a commemorative plaque with the name of a buried person on one of the trees in the territory of the cemetery (May 1991). Author: Valentin Golubovsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

In the past 20 years, on this day, activists and civilians gather near monuments dedicated to the victims or at places of mass executions in diverse cities and regions around the country. In St. Petersburg, this action bears its name - "I would like to name everyone by name ...", and takes place traditionally on Troitskaya Square, in the garden near the Anna Akhmatova Museum, with a trip to the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery.[103] At the event, everyone can bring a portrait of a repressed relative, publicly read his name, light a candle and lay flowers. As a rule, representatives of religious communities hold a funeral service at the cemetery. Besides, there was a local tradition in the city to honor the memory of those shot and killed in the prisons of Leningrad on the first Saturday of June by throwing flowers on the water. This action

[103] The program of the event changes every year, but the mentioned placed remain stable among others. "There Will Be More of Us - Who Remembers!" *Grad Petrov* Radio Station (October 2016) https://www.grad-petrov.ru/broadcast/nas-stanet-bolshe-pomnyashhih/ ; "Russia Lacks Memory" *Grad Petrov* Radio Station (October 2020) https://www.grad-petrov.ru/broadcast/rossii-ne-hvataet-pamyati/

appeared as a symbolic laying of flowers at the grave, as it appeared before the removal of the guard from Levashovo, when no information was provided about the mass graves.

Today, Levashovo is a well-known place, which serves a ground for not only public or diplomatic visits, but also excursions and international discussions for pupils and students.[104] It gives opportunities for the creation of permanent or periodic traditions of visiting the cemetery by various confessional, professional, national or ethnic communities. According to Yevgenia Kulakova, an employee of the Iofe Foundation, there are special days of memory of Pskov and Vologda residents at the cemetery, and on June 14 delegations from the Baltic countries arrive to commemorate at national monuments.[105] Not only ordinary people, but also politicians from abroad or representatives of other countries in Russia visit this place. The guestbook of the cemetery contains some comments and messages which were left by such prominent personalities:

> Thank you for keeping the memory of the lost Estonians alive.
> Paul-Erik Rummo, Minister of Population of the Republic of Estonia. November 2, 2003.[106]

> It's hard to look at such atrocities calmly. Hope it never happens again.
> Alma Adamkene (wife of the President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus). September 3, 2004.[107]

> Pascal Maubert, Consul General of France in St. Petersburg. I'm French. I write in French: Le temps passe, mais le souvenir reste [Time passes, memory remains].
> Margarita Mobert. July 24, 2005.[108]

[104] "Memorialnoye kladbische 'Levashovskaya pustosh'," [Memroial cemetery 'Levashovo Wasteland'] *Nekropoli terrora i gulaga*, https://mapofmemory.org/78-03.

[105] "The place of concentrated memory," *Otkritoye prostranstvo* https://ospace.org/levashovoru?fbclid=IwAR0vHlLl3QuNWGmxXtDO-784U8jO2D7l0uZ2nvebw-MjlGbbNjnDgq9qQSk

[106] "Levashovo Memorial Cemetry: Guest Book." in *The Returned Names. Russian Book of Memory*. http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo-kniga-posetiteley.

[107] Ibid.
Original: Sunku ramiai žiūrėti į tokius žiaurumus. Tikiuosi, kad daugiau niekada tas nebepasikartos. *Alma Adamkienė (супруга президента Литвы Валдаса Адамкуса).* September 3, 2004.

[108] Ibid.
Original: *Паскаль Мобер Генеральный консул Франции в Санкт-Петербурге*. Я француженка. Я пишу по-французски: Le temps passe, mais le souvenir reste [Время проходит, остаётся воспоминание]. *Маргарита Мобер*. July 24, 2005.

It is substantial that Levashovo forms a platform for international dialogue between the national communities that suffered during the years of repression. Such an opportunity is important not only for the inclusion of Russia in the international dialogue about the Soviet past, but also for representatives of other countries to work out their historical policies formed after the collapse of the USSR. As Stolyarova recalls, in 2007 she attended a round table discussion for students from Russia and Estonia in Levashovo, organized by the Memorial Human Rights Group.[109] The topic of conversation was the political disagreements between the two countries after the statement of the Estonian authorities about the dismantling of the statue of the Soviet soldier.

The memory about the victims of political repression in Levashovo has long and often gone beyond the boundaries of the state borders of Russia. No political tensions affect the number of visitors and foreigners wishing to lay flowers at their national or any other of hundreds of monuments and signs. Memorials in this cemetery are created by humans to immortalize humans from different social groups. The variability of these social associations has no boundaries of identity: by nationality, by faith, by group of physical health (disability), by profession, by place of work or residence, etc. This diversity is further evidenced by the guestbook:

> May this cemetery help ensure that there is always peace between Russians and Germans. *Martin Schulz. München, Germany* August 29, 2001.[110]
>
> A group from Rome that wants to remember, together with the Russians, their history, their suffering. August 9, 2002.[111]

[109] Galina Stolyarova, "Stalin's Victims," 3.
[110] Ibid.
Original: Möge dieser Friedhof mithelfen, daß immer Frieden zwischen Russen und Deutschen herrscht. *Martin Schulz. München, Deutschland*
[111] Ibid.
Original: Un gruppo da Roma che vuole ricordare, insieme ai Russi, la loro storia, la loro sofferenza.

> Ukraine, our Nenko! How many more of your flowers in the world?... Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!
>
> Tatiana Kalina, Ternopil. August 3, 2009.[112]
>
> It is very difficult to walk in these places where the souls of our compatriots' rest without guilt. It seems that their souls are looking at us and asking us not to do it again. Eternal memory to all the people who rest here. Many thanks to the people who work here, for their memory and preservation of the monument.
>
> Moratski folk choir. Minsk region of Kletsk district of the Republic of Belarus. September 11, 2010.[113]
>
> It was refreshing to see that the crimes of Hitler and Stalin are also recognized in Russia. Honor and memory to the victims. Anti (from Estonia). August 1, 2018.[114]

Levashovo offers an example of a culture of remembrance of Soviet political repression that brings together many remembering communities in their textual, material and monumental practices of commemoration. Despite the fact that Russia does not openly recognize the Soviet repression a part of its historical narrative, the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery gives ability to other national cultures justifiably include the Russian community in the international dialogue.

Another employee of Iofe Foundation Elena Kondrakhina adds that religious groups often come: Catholics on the day of all saints (Figure 16, Figure 17), Orthodox on the day of remembrance of the repressed and many others.[115] Interestingly, there is no documentary evidence of the presence of Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist religious practices in the cemetery. However, each of these confessional community has a memorial in Levashovo. It is worth noting that the collective memorials to repressed Muslims and Buddhist were built only in

[112] "Levashovo Memorial Cemetry: Guest Book."
Original: Україно, Ненько наша! Скільки ще твого цвиту по світу?.. Слава Україні! Героям слава!
Тетяна Калина, Тернопіль. August 3, 2009.
[113] Ibid.
Original: Вельмі цяжка хадзіць па гэтых мясцінах, дзе без віны пакояцца душы нашых зямлякоў. Здаецца, што іх душы глядзяць на нас і просяць, каб гэта больш не паўтарылася. Вечная памяць усім людзям, якія тут пакояцца. Вялікае дзякуй людзям, якія тут працуюць, за іх памяць і захаванне помніка.
Морацкі народны хор. Мінскай вобласці Клецкага раёна Рэспублікі Беларусь. September 11, 2010.
[114] Ibid.
Original: Oli kosutav näha, et Hitleri ja Stalini kuritegusid tunnistatakse ka Venemaal. Au ja mälestus kannatanutele. *Anti (Eestist)*
[115] "Mesto koncentrirovannoy pamyati." [The place of concentrated memory]

2019,[116] what means that Levashovo memorial cemetery keeps attracting diverse social groups to commemorate the repressed with many others mourning communities.

Figure 16. *Consecration of the memorial to the Catholics of the USSR.* The Center for Recovered Names of the National Library of Russia, http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo

[116] Tatiana Voltskaia, "Neytralizovat' imamov". Ustanovlen pamyatnik tataram – zhertvam repressiy," Society, *Radio Svoboda*, July 24, 2019, https://www.svoboda.org/a/30072752.html; "V Sankt-Peterburge otkryt pamyatnik repressirovannym buddistam," *Nomer Odin*, November 1, 2019, https://gazeta-n1.ru/news/society/79906/.

Figure 17. *Consecration of the memorial "To the Estonians Who Were Innocent Victims of the Stalin Repression."* The Center for Recovered Names of the National Library of Russia, http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo

Figure 18. *Consecration of the Orthodox memorial "To the Executed Pskovians."* The Center for Recovered Names of the National Library of Russia, http://visz.nlr.ru/pages/repressii-levashovo

The Pskov branch of the Memorial erected monuments in Levashovo twice in 1998 and 2011, both times funds were collected with the help of residents of the city of Pskov (Figure 18). The district authorities have never visited the cemetery to commemorate their fellow countrymen. An illustrative example is that in 2012, representatives of the Pskov government officially provided a written refusal to finance a bus trip of relatives of the repressed to Levashovo on September 22 - the day of commemoration of Pskovites.[117] The reason turned out to be strictly formal: support for public associations is carried out from the regional budget only on a competitive basis. The regional administration did not announce a competition for a trip to the place of mass graves of victims of repression in Levashovo, so there is no such project to finance. Levashovo is rarely included in the projects of governmentla structures. For example, during the city *subbotniks*,[118] when various organizations carry out a collective cleaning of the cultural objects assigned to them, not a single memorial cemetery for the victims of repression is on a par with the memorial graves of the victims of the Great Patriotic War.[119]

Anatoly Razumov, the head of the center "Returned Names" and the executive editor of the "Leningrad Martyrology 1937-38, fairly declares:

> Our Levashovo is a place warmed by memory. Very peculiar. This is how it developed and is taking shape. It is used as an example for design or additional decoration of other memorials, such as Butovo near Moscow, Sandarmokh in Karelia, Dubovka near Voronezh.[120]

[117] Lev Shlosberg, Levashovskoye Evangeliye ot narod,." *Pskovskaia Guberniya*, September 26, 2012. https://gubernia.media/number_609/03.php.
[118] Subbotnik as a movement was established in 1919 during the Civil War in Russia. It further developed as a day of free labor for the benefit of society.
[119] "Chinovniki Peterburga provedut subbotnik na gorodskikh kladbishchakh," *Karpovka*, April, 2013. https://karpovka.com/2013-04-26/chinovniki-peterburga-provedut-subbo/.
[120] "Anatoly Razumov on projects for the development of the Levashovskaya Wasteland memorial," *Cogita.ru* (August 2010) http://www.cogita.ru/kolonki/intrevyu/anatolii-razumov.

It is undoubted that Levashovo, as a project of a memorial cemetery for the victims of Soviet political repressions, is a place of a particular value. An investigation that began back in Soviet times, the assistance of KGB officers in opening a secret facility of the state security organs, lengthy negotiations with the city administration and a large number of initiatives for the transformation of the place – all this is hard to believe today. The time when Muravsky managed to win back justice and publicity has already passed today. Suffice it to recall the case of Yuri Dmitriev, who has been imprisoned for many years for having found mass graves in Sandormokh. The phenomenon of Levashovo and the features of this memorial cemetery I will reveal further.

CHAPTER 3. Levashovo as a Memorial of Consensus

In this chapter, I look at Levashovo and how it represents the idea encompassed by the concept of memorial cemetery by providing a view of how the site is organized and what impression it gives as a memorial. The elaboration on the issues of how and what kind of memories are presented there, I situate Levashovo in a broader phenomenon of Russian memorial cemeteries of the victims of Soviet political repression. By showing the spatial organization of the cemetery and the variety of memorials that organically coexist there, I provide an optical observation of the site which is necessary to understand how Levashovo is spatially organized. The diversity of visual representations of memory about the repressed is important to demonstrate how complex and contrasted is the memorial culture about the repression in Russia and how, again, Levashovo manages to keep this puzzle assembled.

3.1. The Levashovo's Concept

Due to the high concentration of completely different memorial cultures, united under the common goal of commemorating the victims of Soviet political repressions, the Levashovo memorial cemetery has become a symbolic place for all such heterogeneous mourners. After the discovery of the Leningrad burial ground, ambiguous documents and evidence that was discovered gave rise to rumors and misunderstandings. It happened that many relatives of the repressed people began to receive short letters from KGB and NKVD representatives stating: "The established place of burial of victims of Stalinist repressions is the Levashovskaya wasteland ...", "victims of repressions in the 30-40s were buried in the area of the village Levashovo ...", "as established, the victims of the repression were buried in the Levashovo

wasteland..."[121] Some people doubted such information, but they still had no other place to come and commemorate their loved ones. The stream of relatives and sympathizers has been transforming the Levashovo cemetery over the last decades, bringing more and more memorials.

The so-called memory markers (crosses, commemorative plaques that are diverse at Levashovo) and monuments, which Zuzanna Bogumil defines as *physical structures* that are created to commemorate a certain event,[122] started to appear at Levashovo right from the year of 1990 when ordinary people got free access to the territory of the field. Memorial cemeteries, which are the prisoner's burial sites, stopped fulfilling their 'original' function after the camp system was demolished. By transforming into camp cemetery of a particular kind, the scattered mass graves provided a spatial framework, where the specific communities could come to express their memorial culture with its beliefs and values.[123] What is important is that such memorial cemeteries do not restrain the variety of non-verbal communication of these communities. Thus, they do not limit or prevent the search for representation of the memory about the repressed, which is already complicated and inexpressible. Moreover, besides the ability of a particular community to construct and share its visual perception of the event this community commemorates, it can reproduce its specific memory by performing rituals, which allow this community to constitute the meaning it puts into its memorial culture.

Levashovo is a place that Jack Santino determines as *spontaneous shrine*, which appears unofficially, and which is aimed to invite the visitor to commemorate the victims and to reflect on the broader public issue built around it.[124] This is why the first monuments to the

[121] "Levashovo Wasteland: Memorials and Memorial signs," *Otkritoye prostranstvo*, https://ospace.org/levashovoru
[122] Zuzanna Bogumil, "Gulag Memories: The Rediscovery and Comemmoration of Russia's Repressive Past. Berghahn Books (2018), 8.
[123] Ibid,10.
[124] Jack Santino. "Performative Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 117 (2004), 365.

repressed were in the form of a stone, which does not give a particular meaning, but makes the attender to individually construct an impression on the commemorated event. However, following Smith's point, I suggest that such places which were seen/perceived as memorial cemeteries on the sites of former camps and shooting ranges, are shrines more by their nature than by their spontaneous appearance.[125] The shrines' main function is to commemorate the victims, so they function as permanent, defining places for commemorative practices and other ways of reproducing a particular memorial culture. Spontaneity in this case is more characteristic of designating how a certain memorial place will be organized under the influence of memorial cultures circulating there. That is, on the example of Levashovo, one can see that it has become a place of concentration of remembering communities, where they set up their small shrines and form one large temple. The Levashovo memorial cemetery was founded and created deliberately by members of the Search group. However, the spontaneity of its occurrence lies in the fact that certain political actions took place or did not take place to influence the development of Levashovo.

As Bogumil aptly points out, all the memorials dedicated to the repressed people (former camps, burial grounds or commemorative symbols in the urban public spaces) appear as simple temporal monuments, which had to be replaced with greater memorial centers.[126] This idea in its best scenario is supposed to be the complex projected and built by the state as a gesture of its repentance and acceptance. However, already at the first contests for the beat memorial to the repressed, organized by Memorial in Saint-Petersburg and Moscow, envisaged to create such centers with monuments and museums to commemorate the victims, and

[125] Kathleen Smith,"A monument for our Times? Commemorating Victims of Repression in Putin's Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies 71*, no. 8 (2019), 1318.
[126] Zuzanna Bogumil. "Stone, Cross and Mask: Searching for Language of Commemoration of the Gulag in the Russian Federation," *Polish Sociological Review* 177 (2012): 76.

archives and libraries to conduct further research on political repression.[127] Basically, because of the human rights nature of the democratic movement, which accompanied the publicization of political repression issues in the 1980s, the social activists and NGOs like Memorial or Sakharov's center intended to work further on the prevention of political injustices in Russia. Levashovo was also conceived as a memorial complex, but the activists only managed to build a wooden church at the entrance of the cemetery and to organize a small exhibition (albeit with an archive) in the former security house.[128]

This still has not happened to any publicly created place of memory in Russia, since public efforts and financial opportunities were only able to create a museum, another monument or church. What is always missing is the economic and political support of the state, or even a deeper involvement that could change the general picture of the memorial culture about the repressed. The State reflects the social demands, it randomly supports certain initiatives, but it never becomes an owner of these memorial places.[129] Though, instead of starting an open confrontation, the Russian politicians both substitute the undesirable past with convenient one and get involved in changing (simplifying) the narratives of Soviet political repression through the financing of historical projects.[130]

[127] Kathleen Smith, "Conflict over Designing a Monument to Stalin's Victims: Public Art and Political Ideology in Russia, 1987-1996." In *Architectures of Russian Identity: 1500 to the Present*, edited by James Cracraft and Daniel Rowland, (Cornell University Press, 2018), 198

[128] The church for a long time existed as a project. It was built only in 2018. "Na Levashovskoy pustoshi sobirayutsya postroit' pravoslavnyy khram," *Karpovka*, July, 2012, https://karpovka.com/2012-07-04/na-levashovskoj-pustoshi-sobirajutsya-po/; "Na Levashovskom kladbishche v Peterburge postroili khram," *Karpovka*, May, 2018, https://karpovka.com/2018-05-12/na-levashovskom-kladbishhe-v-peterburge/;

[129] As Etkind notes that though monuments to the victims of Soviet terror are installed by civil society, the resources necessary to erect these monuments, starting from the ground itself, are controlled by the state. To read more: Alexander Etkind. *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013.

[130] For example, in 2013, was launched a project that supposed to build multimedia historical parks called "Russia is my history" across the country. The exhibitions present the entire history of Russia from ancient times to the present day in a panoramic manner. To read more: https://myhistorypark.ru

3.2. Sacred or Secular? Both or Neither?

The first collective memorials and commemorative signs at Levashovo were the crosses (Figure 19, Figure 20). They were perceived as universal symbols which directly represented their meaning – they signal that the place is a memorial. Many members of Memorial claimed that religious symbols are not suitable for the commemoration of the repressed, because the memory of the Gulag is also secular.[131] Its secularity is determined not necessarily by atheistic values, but by the type of the community and the source of its identity, which commemorates the victims of repression. Rushed by the need to rapidly create a material representation of memory about Soviet political repression in the public space in the early 1990s, the organizations like Memorial (they were the most involved and active initiators) started to search for the embodiment in the familiar symbols (Figure 21). It was hard to find a common idea for the monument during the public discussions, because nobody was ready to invent the new visual language to 'speak' about the repressed.[132]

[131] Dokumenty k voprosu ob otkrytii konkursa na luchshiy proyekt pamyatnika zhertvam politicheskikh repressiy v Petrograde-Leningrade (resheniya, protokoly, stenogrammy), [Documents on the question of opening a competition for the best project of a monument to victims of political repression in Petrograd-Leningrad (decisions, protocols, transcripts)] TSGALI. F.105. Op.6. D.488. L. 2,9,16.

[132] The contests for the best memorial to the repressed in Saint-Peterburg and Moscow in 1990 showed that people had absolutely different expectation of how memory about repression should be represented. However, if some of the projects were perceived as blasphemy, the religious symbolics had the tendency to be the representation with which the majority would agree.

Figure 19. Mourning ceremony of the installation of the Belarusian-Lithuanian monument at the initiative of the Belarusian social and cultural partnership and the Lithuanian community of St. Petersburg. (Authors A. Razumov, I. Chernyakevich) (May 1992). Author: Yury Belinsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

Figure 20. Mourning ceremony of the installation of the Belarusian-Lithuanian monument at the initiative of the Belarusian social and cultural partnership and the Lithuanian community of St. Petersburg. (Authors A. Razumov, I. Chernyakevich) (May 1992). Author: Yury Belinsky. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

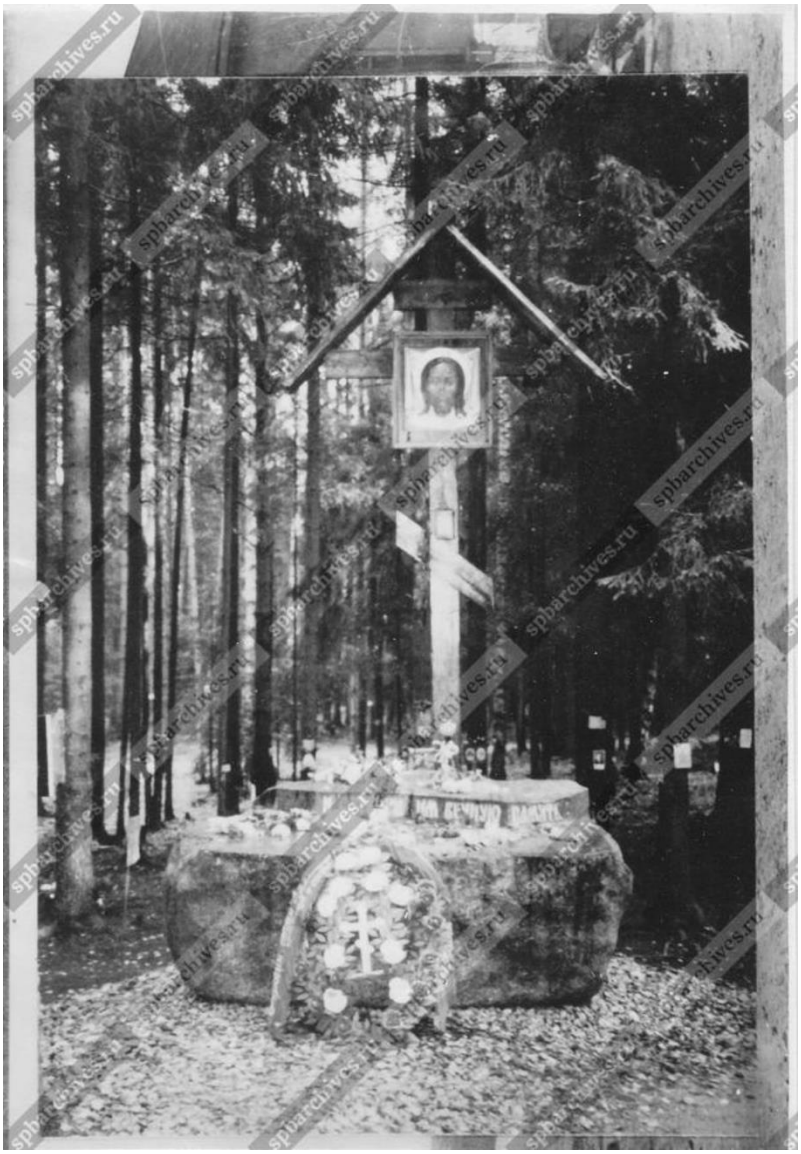

Figure 21. View of one of the monuments of the Levashovskaya Pustosh memorial to the victims of political repression. (October 1997) Author: D. Bogomolov. Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents in Saint-Petersburg.

The active implementation of the religious signs into the construction of such sites of memory as former firing ranges, transformed these places into memorials which were highly impacted by the traditional religious narratives on the issues of death and the commemoration of the buried bodies. This dominance of confessional symbolism (Orthodox) represents Butovo

memorial cemetery and the invention of the "new Russian martyrs" there.[133] As Veronika Dorman highlights, Butovo is a memorial site of "overdetermination for the Church".[134] The processes of putting forward the narrative about the new Russian martyrs and the imposition of purely religious commemorative practices in Butovo, overshadow the fact that among the 20 thousand remains there are other social groups to which the victims of repression belonged.[135] The silence of these features led to the fact that Butovo became a place of pilgrimage. But still, who exactly should be remembered there?

The efforts of the Orthodox Church to maintain the memory of the victims of Soviet political repression tends to stagnate this memory, since the church as an institution does not publicly declare that the communist regime was criminal and that the victims of the Soviet political system lie in the collective graves. The omission of facts that directly prompts a revision of the historical past seems to be very convenient for the Russian politicians. Especially when it becomes necessary to make a public act of visiting such memorial cemeteries to demonstrate the acceptance of certain lessons from the past.

After his first (and only) visit to the Butovo memorial in 2007, Vladimir Putin was asked to share his impressions and thoughts on the current state of memory about the victims of Soviet political repression in Russia. The journalist put his question directly, asking if the Russian government makes everything possible to ensure the society that the tragedy is remembered, and it is not going to happen again. The answer was implicit, but the message was clear:

[133] Zuzanna Bogumil, "Between History and Religion: The New Russian Martyrdom as an Invented Tradition," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures 32*, no. 4 (November 2018), 938.
[134] Veronika Dorman, "From Solovki to Butovo: How the Russian Orthodox Church appropriates the Memory of the Repression. Summary," *Laboratorium 2*, no. 3 (2010), 436.
[135] "Butovo," *A Booklet*, https://martyr.ru/images/Booklet.pdf

> ”We need to do a great deal to ensure that this is never forgotten. To ensure that we always remember this tragedy. But we don’t need these memories in and of themselves. We need them to understand that of course we need political arguments and disagreements, in short, a struggle of opinions to promote the country’s development and choose more effective ways of resolving the problems that face Russia today and those to come. However, to ensure that this process is not a destructive one but rather a creative one, this political struggle must not take place outside the framework of cultural and educational spheres. And in honoring the memory of past tragedies we need to base ourselves on the best things that our people have accomplished. We must combine our efforts and promote Russia's development. We have everything we need to do so”.[136]

Such a past was seen as mass repression, and this perception formed a negative image of the successor state, giving unpleasant headaches to the power. The modern Russian policy of self-determination and self-representation is based on the active instrumentalization of history. An accurate historical policy does not exclude Soviet political repression from the rich history of the formation of the Russian statehood, but politicians prefer to replace such a memory, to diminish its importance by placing it on a par with other examples, or simply leave it behind as the well-forgotten past.

As Alexander Etkind points out,

> Crosses and tombstones recall any death, but not necessarily this particular one that has become the result of a criminal regime. Therefore, monuments do not blame, do not protest and do not explain.[137]

The attempts of the society to develop a secular language to commemorate the victims of repression was not very successful in the beginning. Some of these monuments faced critics from the religious institutions, who could neither understand their concept or accept the references to confessional symbols in them.[138] In the case of memorial cemeteries, the freedom

[136] “Talking with the Press after visiting the Butovo Memorial Site,” *President of Russia*, October 30, 2007, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24627

[137] Alexander Etkind, Vremia sobirat kamni: Postrevolutsionnaia kultura politicheskoi skorbi v sovremennoy Rossii,” [Time to Collect Stones: A Post-Revolutionary Culture of Political Mourning in Contemporary Russia] *Ab Imperio*, no. *2* (2004), 70.

[138] The illustrative example is the monument “The Mask of Sorrow”, erected in 1995, which contained the usage of Christian symbolism. Bogumil, “Stone, Cross, and Mask,” 84.

of visual expression was not strict and indecisive. They created a ground for the diverse memory about the repressed to represent and recreate itself in its multiformity. However, as one can see, this freedom of expression can result in the dominance of one memorial narrative. Maybe the anonymity of the bodies buried in Levashovo "saved" the cemetery from the wars of memories.

Unlike Butovo, Levashovo never was exclusively a place of the commemoration of Orthodox or religious victims. However, there is a designated part of the cemetery which is mainly consisted of the personal memorial signs (portraits, icons, crosses, rosary) of the clergy (Figure 22). Still, first monuments and symbols which appeared at Levashovo mainly represented confessional symbolics that had obvious meaning. Although it happened because the society could not invent another language of remembering the particular dead, none of the cultures of collective memory of the repressed became a dominant narrative there.

Figure 22. The view on multiple individual memorial signs, mostly dedicated to the religious figures (March 2019). Author: Selem Akhmedova.

Gradually, with the arrival of more and more social groups in Levashovo, memorial signs and memorials sometimes began to acquire unusual forms. The appearance of the memorial symbol depended on how this or that community would like to present itself. Those memorial communities or individuals who cannot find funds to build a monument could create more creative memorials, such as: railway workers (Figure 23), Russian writers (Figure 24), rocket engineers (Figure 25) or students and professors (Figure 26).

Figure 23. The memorial sign to the railway workers. Author: Anna Pozharskaya.
https://annawwts.com/levashovo/

Figure 24. The memorial sign to the Russian writers. Author: Anna Pozharskaya. https://annawwts.com/levashovo/

Figure 25. The memorial sign to rocket engineers. Author: Anna Pozharskaya. https://annawwts.com/levashovo/

Figure 26. The memorial sign to the students and professors. Author: Anna Pozharskaya. https://annawwts.com/levashovo/

Moreover, Levashovo also includes many memorial plaques that commemorate certain social groups by nailing to a tree extracts from official documents and court sentences of the NKVD (Figure 27). Some of these documents show how the death sentence was officially carried out, how the NKVD officers should conduct interrogations, when to arrest the wife of the accused, and how to solve the problem with orphans (whose parents were arrested). Such signs are very powerful and in themselves call to think about what Soviet repression is and why it is important to remember about it.

Figure 27. One of the improvised memorial signs on the tree which presents the excerpts from the death sentences (March 2019). Author: Selem Akhmedova.

Notable that some of the religious crosses are accompanied with various secular symbolics, thus, showing the evidence of close interaction of memorials of different kind at Levashovo. Perhaps one of the notable cases will be the modern view of the road crossing in the cemetery, where now, along with the stone, there is an Orthodox cross, national symbol (flags), individual commemorative plaque on the tree and other commemorative symbols of death (wreaths with inscriptions) (Figure 28).

Figure 28. The view on the first memorial in Levashovo (the stone) near the entrance (March 2019). Personal archive of Selem Akhmedova.

Levashovo gave a scene to many different monuments and each of them took their places at the sides of the cemetery's paths. But more spectacular are the tree trunks which are hung with hundreds of memorial signs of completely diversified designs and emotional fulfillment. The memorials and monuments occurred and existed in harmony with each other, showing by their number and difference how many people suffered from Soviet political repression. When the snow falls and covers the ground gravestones and memorials, hundreds of eyes of the repressed continue to stare at the visitor (Figure 29).

Figure 29. The view on multiple individual memorial signs (March 2019). Author: Selem Akhmedova.

The political and social crisis of 1996 and the changes of the official historical narratives highly affected the search for the secular language to commemorate the victims of Soviet political repression. It should be noted that it was precisely the appropriation of the memory of repression by religious institutions (churches) in Russia that allowed the narrative of Soviet repression to gain a foothold in public discourse in a difficult time of political transformations. The Orthodox domination in the commemorative practices and material embodiments to remember the repressed does not disgrace or degrade the memorial culture about the Soviet political repression. However, by occupying the places of memory, it sets the limits on the practices of remembrance and the representativeness of the monuments to the

victims.[139] As I mentioned earlier, the over-domination of religious narratives in the remembrance of the repressed leads to making the actual problematics of collective remembrance of repression not obvious. The indifference of the Russian state to the memorial sites like Levashovo and its unwillingness to care about the remains results in the cases when buildings appear to be standing on the places of mass graves. Like in 2002, when during the construction works at Moscow Supreme Court, the workmen found a pile of bones under the bathroom's floor.[140]

The Russian case of memory about Soviet political repression is truly different from those that exist in other post-Soviet republics. This difference lies in the fact that when each republic has a clear idea of the victims (its own nationality) and the perpetrator (the USSR), Russia, as the official successor, and therefore the culprit of the criminal regime, bears responsibility in front of a large variety of national and other social groups. Thus, the common collective memory of the victims of repression cannot be formed as a narrative, which means that it cannot be enclosed in one image and one monument. Levashovo is a space where this diversity of memorial cultures has independently, by representing themselves throughout the last 30 years, created this very place of common commemoration. Veronika Dorman rightly points outs that

> The collective subject of remembrance could only be established as a subject through the act of embodying, in such a place [place of memory], its will to remember.[141]

[139] Veronika Dorman, "From Solovki to Butovo," 433.
[140] Podlesova, Irina. "Kosti Moskvy." *Izvestia*, July, 2002. . Confirmed places of mass graves in Moscow: Butovo, Kommunarka, Donskoy crematorium, Vagankovskoe cemetery, "Yauzskaya" hospital cemetery. Prospective places: Kalitnikovskoe cemetery, Rogozhskoe cemetery, Cellars under the FSB building, Former G.Yagoda's laboratories, Novo-Spassky monastery cemetery, Khimki, Bratskoe cemetery.
[141] Veronika Dorman, "From Solovki to Butovo," 432.

Every monument or memorial place carries the symbolic capital that was embedded by a certain memorial agency. The composition, visual representation, textual message – everything constitutes a particular commemorative culture of the remembered event. However, no monument can carry on such function as the common embodiment of the memory about the victims of Soviet political repression in Russia. As Vadim Bass points out, "we overestimate monuments as a universal way to anchor a single narrative."[142] And this is the issue which led to the inability of monuments dedicated to the repressed to compete with other official monuments and memorials that always reflect how the state represents its identity in the public space.[143]

The new Russian politicians almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR, in 1996, set themselves the task of coping with the political, social, cultural and economic crisis in the country. The instrumentalization of history, an appeal to the past, and the search for a new identity have led to valuable political transformations, which became the means for a certain monumental politics. Thus, in order to exclude elements of unwanted memory from the public sphere, which reflect the official national identity, the state itself creates an imbalance in investing its financial resources, attention and time in unwanted monuments. In Russia, the authorities do not officially own a single memorial in the memory of the victims of repression. The symbolic capital, which is created in the monument exists initially in the places like Levashovo. The very energy of the remains and the historical narrative that shaped such a memorial cemetery makes it a better memorial than a monument, which always represents a partial narrative or sets up a limited commemoration.

[142] Elena Fanaylova, "Kommunarka," *Radio Svoboda*, March 3, 2019, https://www.svoboda.org/a/29809226.html.
[143] Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers 92*, no. 3 (September 2002), 526.

Conclusion

In this work I examined how Levashovo memorial cemetery absorbed and reflected all the political changes and ambiguous historical politics towards Soviet political repression that happened before and after the collapse of the USSR. During the long and difficult process of publishing secret documents, lack of access to KGB archives, rumors, and inaccurate information from witnesses, Levashovo turned into a place of accumulation of multiple memorial cultures. There is still no exact information about who was buried in the common graves, but for many mourning relatives of the repressed, representatives of national and social groups, this fact has long become unimportant. Now Levashovo is a place where anyone can physically come and carry out their commemorative practices. It became a center of collective and individual, local and foreign, religious and secular rituals of memorizing victims of the same regime. Even Butovo (former shooting range of Moscow region) with its geographical status of being close to the capital does not carry such meaning. It has a certain memorial culture represented, which commemorates "martyrs of the faith" - religious victims first, then secondly all those victims of the Gulag.[144] Levashovo presents a broader space of interaction for bearers of memory. Primarily, it is highly developed in being diverse in acts of commemoration. Not only religious memorial services take place there (although the public commemoration started with it), but also foreign official visits (coming to their national monuments), and prepared excursions around the cemetery (especially on the commemoration day of victims of political repression - October 30).

The example of a memorial cemetery of the repressed represented by Levashovo serves as a possible alternative for a search for a solid representation of memory about Soviet political

[144] Kathy Rousselet, 'The Russian Orthodox Church and Reconciliation with the Soviet Past,' in *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games*, ed. by Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.

repression in one monument. I would like to claim once again that solidification through monuments is either not enough or not very effective in Russia. Lidia Jessin-Jurek defines that:

> Regardless of political connotations, the Gulag as a place of memory has not been an easy issue to handle from the perspective of commemoration rituals. First of all, it refers to a non-clearly defined place ... Secondly, since the experience was not unique to any of the nations in the region, it could not easily be turned into a distinct foundation myth, like Katyn, Holodomor...[145]

Coming back to the previously mentioned issue of Levashovo being a not quite traditional memorial cemetery, I put this problem in a broader historical and political context. I suggest that the situation with former firing ranges and mass graves left by the former regime explains the problematics and complexity of the memory politics and culture in Russia through its attitude to the remains, to the bodies of victims. It should not be necessarily the act of heroization, but the act of sorrow and perpetuation. When the war has a well-developed act of commemoration in Russia (monuments, financially supported and spatially organized memorial cemeteries, official annual commemoration at burials, etc.), mass graves of the repressed remain ignored by Russian officials.

To deservedly evaluate the level of development of memorial culture about the repression in modern Russia, it is necessary to note that it is half-dialogic. We cannot disrespect the dialog between different national, collective, individual memories, which find their embodiment, sharing commemoration practices at such common memory places such as Levashovo. But it is the Russian politicians and reasonable Russian memory politics, which are always missing to fulfill the discussion.

[145] Lidia Jessin-Jurek, "The rise of an East European community of memory? : on lobbying for the Gulag memory via Brussels," in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier, Joanna Wawrzyniak (Berghahn Books, 2016), 138.

Remembering is a continuous process and memory can be limitlessly transformed. To let it be transformed and to acquire new meanings, the dialogic memory has to maintain simultaneous remembrance on the separate but interrelated levels of individuals, families, society, and the state. Only then the next and final step in dialogic remembering between nations will be achieved, when states are sharing the common narrative and knowledge about the traumatic past to continuously reproduce it.

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