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Suppressing collective memory: Chechnya's 'Day of Memory and Grief' and the rehabilitation of Stalinism in today's Russia

Cornelia Klocker

The 'Day of Memory and Grief' is a day of commemoration in Chechnya. It marks the beginning of the deportation of Chechens and Ingush from the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Chechen-Ingush ASSR) to Siberia and Central Asia ordered by Joseph Stalin on 23 February 1944. Today, the commemoration is being obstructed by bans on gatherings on the original date combined with the dismantling of the memorial devoted to the event. The 'Day of Memory and Grief' memorialises the deportation of entire peoples – an example of the atrocities committed by Stalin from the 1920s until his death in 1953. Devoted to this collective memory, the day stands in stark contrast to the Russian official line of remembrance of the Stalin era focussed on the victory in the Great Patriotic War in 1945. In the following, an account of how local collective memories contesting this official historical narrative are conceived by the authorities as impeding the construction of a national Russian identity based on patriotism and the love of the fatherland will be presented.

The deportation

In Soviet times, the 'Red Army Day', a national holiday devoted to soldiers' achievements and patriotism in general, was celebrated on the 23rd of February. However, on 23 February 1944, the events took a different turn in what was then the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. A decree was read out to the Chechens telling them that they had been found guilty of treason, of collaborating with Nazi Germany during the Second World War – which has become known as the 'Great Patriotic War' in Russia. For this reason, the entire Chechen and Ingush population, was deported to Central Asia and Siberia. Around half a million people were loaded onto trains and trucks, many died during the journey due to poor sanitary conditions and many more died in the

provisional camps set up for them – the ‘special settlers’ as they were called – in the hostile Russian steppes or in Siberian labour camps.¹

It was only in 1957, with Stalin’s regime gone and Nikita Khrushchev’s power established, that the Chechens were exculpated and were allowed to return to their homeland, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Although local Russian authorities tried to prevent their return, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was eventually re-established in the same year and replaced the Grozny Oblast – the region’s official name during their exile. When the Chechens returned, ethnic Russians lived in most of their homes and their graveyards had been destroyed, as had their cultural and religious sites such as mosques. After clashes between the returned and the new occupants, the Chechens eventually re-established their presence in their homeland.² During the Soviet era, the deportation was remembered locally through stories of what had happened and passed on to the next generation by survivors as there was no official or public platform to commemorate. The Soviet government did not allow any commemorations and did not compensate the victims.³

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the deportation was increasingly discussed in public and efforts were made to preserve the collective memory of the Chechens. These efforts were supported by the Chechen independence movement headed by Dzhokhar Dudaev, who grew up in exile himself. Chechnya declared its independence from Russia in 1991.⁴ In 1992, a memorial was erected in the capital Grozny and large rallies were held to commemorate the

¹ Brian G. Williams, “Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya,” *History and Memory* 12 (2000): 112; “Жертвы политического террора в СССР,” Human Rights Centre Memorial, December 13, 2012, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://lists.memo.ru/>; when it comes to commemoration in Ingushetia, the authorities there support commemorations, which is another indicator for the situation in Chechnya stemming from Kadyrov’s loyal ties to the Kremlin: Valery Dzutsati, “Official Grozny Fails to Mark 70th Anniversary of the Chechen Deportations,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, March 5, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42045&cHash=4d1d552469bfabcb0574f512d012cef2#.V2JkdPkrLIU.

² Moshe Gammer, “Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past,” in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences*, ed. Bruno Coppieters et al. (Brussels: Brussels University Press, 2002), 130-131; Williams, “Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya,” 114-115.

³ Williams, “Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya,” 106-107.

⁴ Williams, “Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya,” 119.

deportation, in particular in 1994 due to its fiftieth anniversary.⁵ Shortly afterwards, the First Chechen War between Chechnya and Russia, which lasted from 1994 to 1996, began. After the defeat of the Russians, Chechnya experienced a period of de facto independence before being invaded again by Russian forces in 1999. Following a year of heavy fighting including air strikes and the shelling of Chechen towns and villages, this Second Chechen War continued with sporadic attacks and fighting between insurgents and forces of the Chechen Republic which took over from the Russian forces.⁶

Silencing minority collective memory

The deportation of the Chechen people was remembered traditionally by Chechens on 23 February. However, in 2011 the Kremlin-loyal Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov decided to relocate the commemoration from the 23rd of February to the 10th of May. Just a year after declaring the 23rd of February the date for official commemoration of the deportation, Kadyrov changed the dates again and slightly amended the name of the day to ‘Day of Memory and Grief of the nations of the Republic’. In addition to opposition to the change in date, this change in name was criticised for downplaying the effect of the deportation on ethnic Chechens.⁷

The 10th of May marks the burial of Akhmad Kadyrov, the Chechen leader appointed by Vladimir Putin during the Second Chechen War and father of Ramzan Kadyrov. He was assassinated by pro-insurgent forces on 9 May 2004 when a bomb exploded in Grozny’s football stadium during the Victory Day parade celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany. Now, the ‘Day of Memory and Grief’, which originated from the deportation of an entire people, has been linked to the death of a controversial politician, who installed a repressive regime, persecuting alleged insurgents and their families.⁸

⁵“Чеченские власти демонтируют Мемориал памяти жертв депортации в Грозном Источник,” *Caucasian Knot*, February 14, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/238169>.

⁶ Emil Souleimanov, *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 95-172.

⁷ Aude Merlin, “Remembering and forgetting in Chechnya today: Using the Great Patriotic War to create a new historical narrative,” in *Chechnya at war and beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 45-47.

⁸ “Residents of Chechnya do not agree to treat May 10 as mourning date,” *Caucasian Knot*, May 10, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/35534/>;

Furthermore, the 23rd of February is now again devoted to the Russian-wide commemoration of the ‘Red Army Day’, which was renamed ‘Defender of the Fatherland Day’ by Putin in 2002. It is a day devoted to the commemoration of soldiers, of the sacrifices they made for the country and a celebration of patriotism and masculinity in general, which in addition to its military character can be seen as the counterpart to Women’s Day⁹ – a Men’s Day where alleged traitors and the elderly, women and children dying during deportation and in exile, have no place. Aude Merlin cites a Grozny intellectual analysing the change in the date as follows: ‘this was “to avoid being sad during a celebration,” which would have been the case had the 23rd of February been maintained as a national Chechen day of mourning’.¹⁰ As she rightly observes, the focus was on the heroes to be remembered, not the victims.¹¹

Since 2011, when Kadyrov moved the commemoration to the 10th of May, public commemorations of the deportation on 23 February have been suppressed. For instance in 2014, the President of the Assembly of Caucasian Nations, Ruslan Kutaev, was sentenced to four years of imprisonment after speaking out against the ban of commemoration events on the original date.¹² In the same year, the memorial to victims of the deportation built in 1992 and located in Chechnya’s capital Grozny was dismantled. The memorial consisted of an array of gravestones brought from all regions of Chechnya surrounding a raised arm with a dagger and an open Quran. On the wall behind the memorial was the inscription: ‘We will not cry! Not lose! Not forget!’. Officially, the memorial was moved due to the sale of the land where it stood to a private businessman, but local residents spoke of a deliberate move to suppress memory of the deportation. Several gravestones, parts of the memorial, were brought to another site located on the Akhmad Kadyrov Square and placed next to a

“Жители Чечни заявили о подмене Дня памяти и скорби трауром по Ахмату Кадирову,” *Caucasian Knot*, May 10, 2015, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/262046/>.

⁹ Ekaterina Turysheva and Vladimir Erkovich “Russia celebrates its men on Army Day,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, February 22, 2013, accessed June 16, 2017, http://rbth.com/arts/2013/02/22/russia_celebrates_its_men_on_army_day_23175.html.

¹⁰ Merlin, “Remembering and forgetting in Chechnya today,” 45.

¹¹ Merlin, “Remembering and forgetting in Chechnya today,” 39-41.

¹² “Court in Chechnya sentences Ruslan Kutaev to four years in prison,” *Caucasian Knot*, July 7, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/28644/>.

memorial commemorating fallen members of local pro-Russian security forces with no separate inscription or explanation as to the different meaning associated with the gravestones.¹³

Taken together, all these campaigns against the commemoration and the combination of the remembrance of the deportation with that of Kadyrov's assassination appear to be aimed at silencing this particular collective memory of the Chechen people. It is downplayed, separated from its date and as it might be intended by the Federal as well as Chechen authorities, hopefully forgotten.

A similar strategy can be observed in Russian annexed Crimea, where the Russian administration has banned the commemoration of the deportation in 2014. Just as in the Chechen case, the Crimean Tatars were deported in 1944 by order of Stalin on treason allegations. The Crimean Tatars commemorate this part of their history on the 18th of May but since 2014, commemorative gatherings were prohibited and people speaking out against it arrested.¹⁴ These acts are part of a broader campaign against the Crimean Tatars under Russian rule branding them as extremists and banning their organisations.¹⁵

Creating a Russian national identity

According to Maurice Halbwachs' study on collective memory, 'the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present'.¹⁶ He argues that '[c]ollective frameworks are, to the contrary,

¹³“Chechen authorities dismantle Memorial to deportation victims in Grozny,” *Caucasian Knot*, February 14, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/27286/>; “Чеченские власти демонтируют Мемориал памяти жертв депортации в Грозном Источник,”; Aleksander Cherkasov, “Память бывает разная,” *Эхо Кавказа*, February 23, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/25274546.html>.

¹⁴ Greta Uehling, “Genocide's Aftermath: Neostalinism in Contemporary Crimea,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 9 (2015):13-14; see also Nanci Adler, “Reconciliation with – or rehabilitation of – the Soviet past?,” *Memory Studies* 5 (2012): 327-338.

¹⁵ Halya Coynash, “Crimean Tatar Mejlis Leader Arrested on ‘Extremism’ Charges,” Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, May 13, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1463067076>; Halya Coynash, “Russia bans Mejlis, declares war on Crimean Tatar people while the West watches,” Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, April 27, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1461673479>.

¹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 40.

precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.¹⁷ What is of particular interest in these quotes in the present context, is the reference to ‘predominant thoughts’. Talking about the reconstruction of the past, Halbwachs observes that the recreation of memory is happening under the pressure of society. This pressure leads to a ‘transfiguration’ of the past and a reproduction of memories with ‘a prestige that reality did not possess’.¹⁸ The resulting transfigured version of the past denotes society’s ‘predominant thoughts’. Essentially, these thoughts have led to the ban of deportation commemorations on the original date in Chechnya and to a silencing of the local collective memory conflicting with the official Russian narrative of the Stalin era focusing on the victory in the Second World War.

Official attempts to emphasise certain memories and to suppress others are indicative of a historical narrative aimed at fostering a certain idea, an ideology or a national identity – a development visible in Russian state policy today.¹⁹ In the post-Soviet era, Boris Yeltsin admitted that Russia needed a ‘Russian idea’ after he failed with his attempt to democratise the country against Soviet nostalgia supported by a poor economic situation. Putin, who took over after him, decided to make this search for such an idea one of his priorities.²⁰

Putin launched broad educational campaigns including the rewriting of history textbooks in order to demonstrate a contingency in Russian history, pointing at Russian victories and achievements over centuries, aiming at educating young people to be patriotic and to love their country.²¹ This ‘love for the fatherland’ is a notion deriving from Soviet patriotism described as ‘the natural feeling of millions of citizens who ardently love’ their country ‘which has given them a

¹⁷ Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, 40..

¹⁸ Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, 51.

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006).

²⁰ Murod Ismailov and Nozima Ganieva, “In Search for the Russian National Identity: Do History Textbooks Hold the Answer?,” *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 5 (2013): 384-388.

²¹ Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady and Michael Lovorn, “Patriotism, History Teaching, and History Textbooks in Russia: What Was Old Is New Again,” in *Globalisation, Ideology and Politics of Education Reforms*, ed. Joseph Zajda (Heidelberg: Springer, 2015), 42-43.

happy, prosperous life.’²² During Putin’s second presidential term, Alexander Filippov, the deputy director of the National Centre for Foreign Policy, an organisation close to the Federal government, did a great deal to support this patriotic affection for the country. Filippov wrote handbooks for teachers describing Stalin’s actions as resulting in the modernisation of the country and as necessary in a time preparing for war with Nazi Germany. In his depiction, the mass repression and killing were considered a means to an end and are dealt with only briefly before turning to the heroic victory in the Great Patriotic War when the Soviet Union rescued the world from fascism.²³ With the beginning of the new school year in autumn 2016, several history textbooks which attempted to present a more comprehensive version of the Stalin era against that official narrative, were sanctioned. Addressing the Second World War and the time under Stalin, these books included an account of Stalin’s relationship with Nazi Germany as expressed in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as well as of Stalinist repressions.²⁴

The emphasis on the victory in the Great Patriotic War represents a cornerstone in the attempt to form a ‘Russian idea’ and a Russian identity.²⁵ A national identity is not easily built on a past where Stalin’s regime deported entire peoples such as the Chechens, Ingush and Tatars. It is rather built on achievements – on Stalin’s efforts to industrialise the country, to conquer space and to defeat the fascists in the Great Patriotic War.²⁶ Changing the date of the

²² Olga Nikonova, “Soviet patriotism in a comparative perspective: a passion for oxymora,” *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 62 (2010): 370.

²³ Thomas Sherlock, “Confronting the Stalinist Past: The Politics of Memory in Russia,” *Washington Quarterly* 34 (2011): 96.

²⁴ Ola Cichowlas, “How Russian Kids Are Taught World War II: A new history curriculum is raising concern among teachers,” *The Moscow Times*, May 8, 2017, accessed June 16, 2017, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/how-russian-kids-are-taught-world-war-ii-57930>; Michail Chernysh, “Collective memory and its Cultural Antecedents in Russia,” in *Collective Memories in War*, ed. Elena Rozhdestvenskaya et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 20; Thomas Sherlock, “Russian politics and the Soviet past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49 (2016): 53.

²⁵ Justyna Prus, “Russia’s Use of History as a Political Weapon,” *Polish Institute of International Affairs Policy Paper* 12, May 2015, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=19763.

²⁶ Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 165-167; Nanci Adler, “The Future of the Soviet Past Remains

commemoration of the deportation of Chechens under Stalin contributes to this endeavour as it clears the Defender of the Fatherland Day from negative connotations. Furthermore, it indicates the scale of the government's identity-building project, ranging from re-writing curricula to re-designing or rather suppressing, regional commemorations.

As Thomas Sherlock has written, a considerable number of Russians today perceive Soviet times and in particular the Stalin era 'as a time of political and economic stability, of international prestige, but perhaps most important, of national purpose and cohesion' which provided 'meaning to individual and collective existence.'²⁷ The Federal authorities want to take up on these sentiments in order to foster a positive unified Russian identity. Yet simplified historical narratives, nostalgia for certain periods which in that form might have never existed and the creation of a myth centred on the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War are abstracting from the historical facts to an incomprehensible collection of images.²⁸ And between those images are gaps – gaps representing information considered unwanted, unnecessary or simply not worth mentioning. One additional problem here is the widespread lack of interest in the atrocities committed under Stalin which is particularly the case for the younger generation of Russians.²⁹ This indifference or negligence allows the Federal authorities to deal with the issue relatively undisturbed.

A national identity for the majority

In the pursuit of this Russian national identity, legislation has been adopted at Federal level aimed at unifying the Russian majority against minorities such as the Chechens. This stands in contrast to initial

Unpredictable: The Resurrection of Stalinist Symbols Amidst the Exhumation of Mass Graves," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (2005): 1097-1101.

²⁷ Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*, 149-150; Sherlock, "Russian politics and the Soviet past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin," 12: A study in 2014 revealed that 52% of interviewed Russians considered Stalin to have 'definitely' or 'more likely than not' played a positive role in the life of the country.

²⁸ Liudmila Mazur, "Golden age mythology and the nostalgia of catastrophes in post-Soviet Russia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 57 (2015): 215-218.

²⁹ Sherlock, "Russian politics and the Soviet past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin," 12-13; see also Sherlock, "Confronting the Stalinist Past: The Politics of Memory in Russia,".

attempts by the Putin-led government at creating such a national identity based on the unifying effects of the Great Patriotic War. Now in his third presidential term, Putin is not focussing on gathering the entire Russian population under his flag, but only the majority – therefore deliberately excluding certain groups and uniting the majority against them by adopting divisive laws such as those referred to below.

This represents one of the practices and tactics related to the imposition of a certain historical narrative that is reserved for the regime in power – the imposition of sovereign violence through law, a point Yıldız refers to in relation to the understanding of counter-archives by Motha and van Rijswijk who describe a reorientation of ‘the law in the wake of histories of violent sovereign impositions’.³⁰

In the present context, the ‘commission to counter attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russia's interests’ active from 2009 to 2012³¹ and the related law against the ‘rehabilitation of Nazism’ adopted in 2014 are illustrative.³² Both are aimed at the creation of an official historical narrative, bolstered by criminal sanctions in case of contraventions.³³ The law against the rehabilitation of Nazism is not, as it is the case in other countries such as Austria and Germany, aimed at prohibiting the denial of the Holocaust and the dissemination of other Nazi propaganda, but is referring to ‘Nazism’ as the term was used in the Soviet Union after the Second World War to ‘demonize

³⁰ Stewart Motha and Honni van Rijswijk, “Introduction: A counter-archival sense,” in *Law, Memory, Violence: Uncovering the counter-archive*, ed. Stewart Motha et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 2.

³¹ Presidential Decree establishing the Commission: Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 15 мая 2009 г. N 549 "О Комиссии при Президенте Российской Федерации по противодействию попыткам фальсификации истории в ущерб интересам России", accessed June 16, 2017, <https://rg.ru/2009/05/20/komissia-dok.html>; Presidential Decree dissolving the Commission: Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 14.02.2012 г. № 183, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/34810>.

³² Федеральный закон от 5 мая 2014 г. N 128-ФЗ "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации", accessed June 16, 2017, <https://rg.ru/2014/05/07/reabilitacia-dok.html>.

³³ Nataliya Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 175-207.

political opponents'.³⁴ For instance, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the Ukrainian government of following 'openly nationalist, radical, neo-Nazi trends' in April 2016.³⁵

This strategy might intend to strengthen Putin's position generally at the cost of minorities – and this is also true for the suppressed commemoration of the deportation of entire peoples under Stalin. Since the local narratives of these peoples, be them Chechens, Ingush or Tatars, do not conform to the government line on commemoration, their collective memory is suppressed at worst and ignored at best by the authorities.

A look at the different case studies presented in this collection highlights the constantly changing, challenged and evolving nature of objects of memory and rituals of memorialisation. Together, they cover the imposition of historical narratives by sovereign violence as well as counter-hegemonic movements and practices, indicating the process of memorialisation and the impact of the present in general and current power relationships in particular on the way the past is remembered and reconstructed. The suppression of local collective memory in the course of state-funded identity-creation projects is illustrative not of a society's unity, but of a forced, imposed uniformity, a superficial cover for underlying tensions within a state's society to create artificial homogeneity. Violent impositions of narratives of the past only increase these underlying tensions and impede chances for reconciliation which in theory represents one of the core functions of memorials and commemorations. Although official commemorations are not *per se* harmful to local collective memory, the way in which those commemorations are held is crucial. Due to the power that comes with a state apparatus, violent impositions of certain narratives suppressing alternative collective memory are likely to benefit from such resources. It is this violence, trying to force a national identity upon a society, that suppresses the local collective memory.

³⁴ Ivan Kurilla, "The Implications of Russia's Law against the "Rehabilitation of Nazism," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* No. 331, August 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/201408_Kurilla.

³⁵ "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to questions at the meeting in Mongolia's Foreign Ministry," Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 14, 2016, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/2233937.

An interesting contrast between the papers in the collection can be found in the ways in which violence is imposed and how it relates to the affected groups and their struggle. Whereas the left-right divide between political movements in Milan and Bologna engulfs the population of these cities as such, Russian and Turkish authorities have used the Chechen and Kurdish minority identity to frame their actions and separate these groups from the majority population. This identity framing might have facilitated or contributed to the severe measures the states have taken in response to local collective memories and identities conflicting with the official narrative; outright bans of commemorations, curfews and military operations.

When it comes to collective memory in the context of Russia, it is useful to keep in mind the very flexible and surprisingly unpredictable character of its history. As the Soviet Union collapsed only in 1991, Russia as a state is still relatively young and there is a sense of trying to regain this feeling of ‘national purpose and cohesion’ present in Soviet times among Russians today. A particular fitting depiction of this situation is drawn by Coser in his introduction to Halbwachs’ *On collective memory*. He talks briefly about his own experience with Soviet colleagues (writing in the nineties) and notes their reluctance to discuss current events coming to the following conclusion: ‘[T]hese people had been forced in the last few years to shed their own collective memory like a skin, and to reconstruct a largely different set of collective memories.’³⁶

The search for a national identity as pursued by the Russian Federal government has highlighted the resistance it encountered when faced with contesting local collective memories which do not conform with the ‘predominant thoughts’ centred on the achievements during the Stalin era, such as the deportation of Chechens, Ingush and Tatars by Stalin. As one Chechen resident speaking out against the new date for remembering the deportation has put it: ‘For any self-respecting Chechen, February 23 was, is and will be the mourning day for the victims of Stalin's deportation. Even the Soviet power failed, for decades, make us forget about this tragedy;

³⁶ Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, Introduction by Lewis A. Coser, 21.

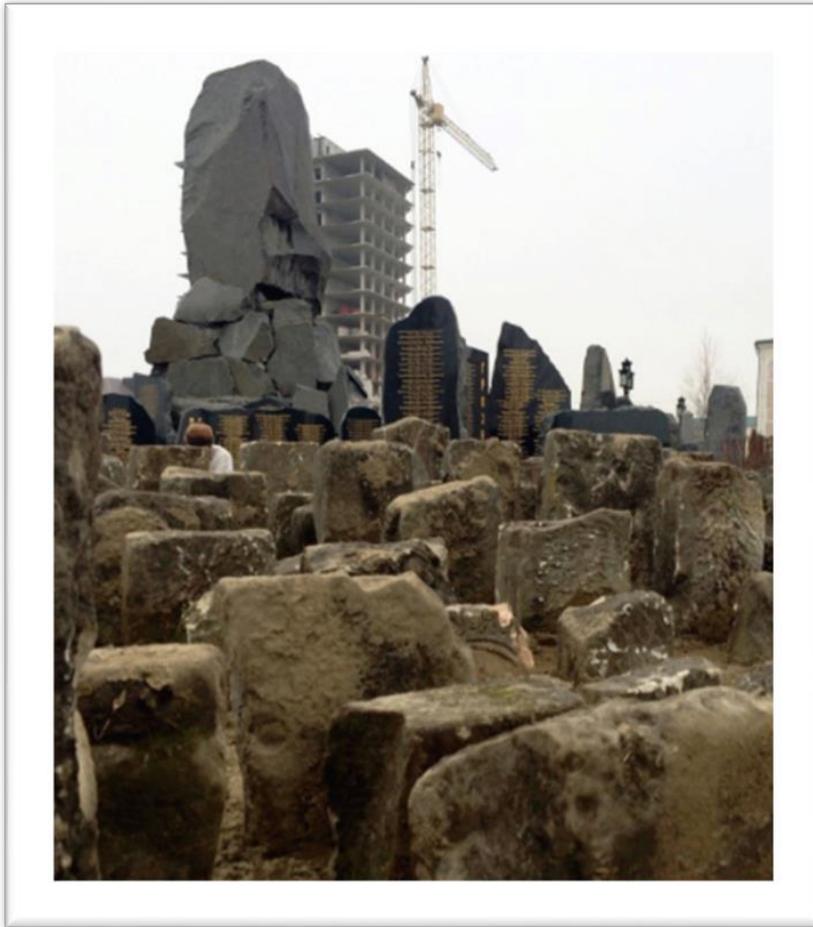
moreover, our current authorities will not manage to do it, although, I must say, they make just incredible efforts towards it.³⁷

This account of local collective memory of the deportation of the Chechens under Stalin and the official narrative based on the achievements during Soviet times has shown how narratives of the past are constantly reshaped. The violent imposition of a national identity based on patriotism and the great achievements of the Russian state throughout history has failed to unify all groups of society. Acknowledging that, the present government has decided to suppress and neglect local collective memory contradicting the official account of the past. This forced suppression however, will only provide some apparent uniformity on the surface of Russian society, while resistance and struggle against it are likely to grow underneath, challenging the ‘predominant thoughts’ promoted by state power.



<http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/pam/?t=photo&id=108> - photo by M.Chemchieva, printed as a part of a postcard collection "Destroyed city" (Разрушенный город) from the series "Russian-Chechen war 1994-1996", GRAND INTERNATIONAL, Grozny, 1998. web-database "Memorials to victims of political repressions in former USSR", www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/pam

³⁷ “Residents of Chechnya disagree to combine Remembrance Day with mourning for Akhmad Kadyrov,” *Caucasian Knot*, May 10, 2017, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/39323/>.



Memorial commemorating fallen members of local pro-Russian security forces (with the added gravestones – the memorial itself consists of the grey column and the black stones with golden inscriptions), Grozny, _provided by Internet-agency Caucasian Knot www.kavkaz-uzel.eu_