BRINGING STALIN BACK IN: CREATING A USEABLE PAST IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

A dissertation submitted
to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Todd H. Nelson
August, 2013
Dissertation written by
Todd H. Nelson
M.A., School of International Service, American University, 1998
B.A., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1995

Approved by

Andrew Barnes, Ph.D., Co-Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Julie Mazzei, Ph.D., Co-Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Patrick Coy, Ph.D., Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Kenneth Bindas, Ph.D., Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Accepted by

Andrew Barnes, Ph.D., Chair, Department of Political Science
Ray Craig, Ph.D., Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
# Table of Contents

List of Figures...........................................................................................................................................v
Acknowledgements......................................................................................................................................vi

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

The Marginalized Discourse: The Stalinist Terror ................................................................. 6
The Dominant Discourse of Stalinism in Russia Today ............................................................. 13
An Illustration: Conversations on a Train .................................................................................. 16
Setting the Parameters ..................................................................................................................... 20
  * Human Right Abuses and Political Repression ................................................................. 20
  * Power as Such: Symbolic Power and the Political Elite ................................................ 22

Research Design and Method ........................................................................................................... 25
Data Collection ................................................................................................................................. 27
Situating the Main Argument of This Study ............................................................................. 28
  * Discourse, Myth, and Narrative .......................................................................................... 29
  * Collective Memory ................................................................................................................ 35
  * Memorialization ................................................................................................................... 38

The Contours of This Study ............................................................................................................... 40

**Dissertation Chapter 2: ‘Soft Memory’ Part I** ........................................................................... 42

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 42
The Role of Stalin in the Historical Discourse of the Soviet Period ............................................. 43
The Content and Significance of the Great Patriotic War Narrative .......................................... 48
The Contemporary Discourse of Stalin’s Terror ......................................................................... 51
Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Russia: Longing for the Good Old Days .......................................... 58
The Political Elite and the Re-Casting of Discourse about the Soviet Period .......................... 63
The Political Elite and the Media .................................................................................................... 67
Contrasting Characteristics of the Terror and the Great Patriotic War Narratives ................. 72

**Chapter 3: ‘Soft Memory’ Part II** ............................................................................................... 77

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 77
The Changing Face of History: Assessing the Soviet Period ...................................................... 81
Education and Discourse Control in Post-Soviet Russia ............................................................. 86
The Narrative of Political Repression under Stalin in State-Sponsored Textbooks ............... 89
  * Repression as Necessary for Industrialization .................................................................. 92
  * The Narrative of the Stalinist Terror: The Absence of Agency ......................................... 94
  * The Portrayal of the Strong Centralized State in Textbook Narratives .............................. 96
  * The Brevity of Text Devoted to Stalin's Repressions .......................................................... 99
  * The Use of Language in Presentations of the Stalinist Repressions and the Great Patriotic War ................................................................. 102

Direct Control of the Stalinist Narrative by the State: The Dominance of the Filippov Text in High School History Curricula ......................................................................................... 104
Limiting the Discourse: The Changing Nature of School Curricula ........................................ 108
The Decline of Interest in History in Post-Soviet Russia ........................................................... 110
Implications of State Control of the Historical Discourse in History Curricula ...................... 113
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 115

**Chapter 4: ‘Hard’ Memory** ........................................................................................................ 117
Comparing Memorialization of the Great Patriotic War and the Stalinist Repressions 117
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 117
Discourse and Memorialization in Russia ...................................................................................... 122
Memorials to the Great Patriotic War ............................................................................................ 125
Ubiquity of Physical Reminders ...................................................................................................... 125
Access to War Memorial Sites ........................................................................................................ 128
Memorialization of the Repressions and the Terror .................................................................... 138
Dearth of Physical Reminders ......................................................................................................... 138
Access to Memorial Sites ................................................................................................................. 140
Composition of Memorial Sites: Solovki and the Perm-36 Strict-Regime Camp .................... 145
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 159
Chapter 5: Civil Society and Access to Discourse on the Soviet Period ................................... 163
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 163
‘Civil Society’ in Russia: The Specter of Revolution and Threats from Abroad .................... 166
Memorial International ..................................................................................................................... 177
History of the Organization .............................................................................................................. 177
Portrayal of the Soviet Period and Stalinism ............................................................................... 179
Relationship with the State .............................................................................................................. 182
The Nashi Youth Movement ........................................................................................................... 188
History of the Organization .............................................................................................................. 188
Portrayal of the Soviet Period and Stalinism ............................................................................... 190
Relationship with the State .............................................................................................................. 192
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 196
Chapter 6: Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 199
The Contribution of This Study ....................................................................................................... 199
Implications of This Study .............................................................................................................. 202
Perpetuating the Manipulation of the Stalinist Discourse in Russia ........................................... 203
Implications of the Methods of Discourse Control in Russia ..................................................... 206
Transitional Justice, Democracy, and the Lack Thereof ............................................................... 209
References ....................................................................................................................................... 217
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Hand Lettered signs at the museum at the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery

Figure 2. Memorial to naval cadets killed during the Great Patriotic War on the Main Solovetsky Island

Figure 3. Sign in St. Petersburg indicating the route to the State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad, in Russian and English

Figure 4. A mock-up of a Leningrad apartment during the blockade at the State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad

Figure 5. The monastery on the Main Solovetsky Island coming into view from across the White Sea

Figure 6. The memorial to victims of political repression on the Robespierre Embankment along the Neva River in St. Petersburg

Figure 7. Bunk beds on display at the Perm-36 camp

Figure 8. A modern exhibit at the Perm-36 museum

Figure 9. A handmade memorial to a victim of the NKVD buried at Levashovo

Figure 10. Varied memorials to victims of the Terror buried at Levashovo
Acknowledgements

The successful completion of an undertaking as grand as a doctoral dissertation requires the assistance of many people along the way. I am greatly indebted to the chairs of my committee, Andrew Barnes and Julie Mazzei, for the countless hours devoted to thorough and attentive readings of many drafts of this dissertation, and their helpful (if sometimes painful) suggestions for revisions. They managed to guide me through many difficult questions, while helping me to sharpen and maintain the focus of the dissertation. Another member of my committee, Pat Coy, also spent a great deal of time reading over the draft, and offered wisdom and kind words at a time when both were greatly needed, and for which I am grateful. Brian Baer and Ken Bindas also deserve thanks for their insights and suggestions that improved this dissertation considerably.

In Russia, I owe profound thanks to Vyatcheslav Morozov, my advisor during my fieldwork and my time as a research scholar at the School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University. He offered piercing (and often humorous) insights into Russian politics and history, and was instrumental in helping me with interviews as well as developing the focus of my data collection. An old friend Valeriya Paoli is also due thanks for her considerable assistance in arranging interviews and for giving her perspectives on Soviet history and Stalinism. I am also very grateful to the Memorial organization—particularly the staff of its St. Petersburg office, who suggested sites for me to visit, arranged for me to conduct interviews, and allowed me to spend large amounts of time hanging out in their offices drinking tea while poring over materials from their library. Lastly, without the contribution of the dozens of
Russians who were kind enough to share their stories with me while in Russia, this study would simply not have been possible.

Finally there are those whose contributions are more difficult to express. To my parents, I am grateful for their constant encouragement to pursue what I enjoy doing—even if it meant being away in Russia for years at a time. Most importantly, I am thankful and blessed for the love, friendship, and support of my wife, Megan Testa, throughout this endeavor, especially her tolerance of my conducting three months of fieldwork at a time when she was five months pregnant with our son.
A Note on Transliteration

I have used a modified form of the Library of Congress (LOC) system of transliteration, omitting the use of the apostrophe to indicate a soft sign in the Russian alphabet, and using a ‘y’ instead of an ‘i’ to indicate palatization. I depart from this in the case of names that have appeared commonly in the media, such as Yeltsin.
Chapter 1: Introduction

*Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.*
*(Orwell 1950:248)*

During my second year of study in St. Petersburg in 1996, I went to the annual Victory Day parade (celebrating the Soviet victory over the Nazis in World War II) on Nevsky Prospect in the heart of the city. There I watched military units pass by, followed by survivors of the siege of Leningrad during World War II, and the survivors of military units that fought against the Nazis. The parade ended in Palace Square, and what appeared to be a scheduled protest broke out, with participants waving the red Soviet flag and singing Communist Party songs. In the middle of the crowd, I was astounded to see several posters of Stalin being waved about. I could not understand how the extensive revelations of Stalin’s crimes in the Soviet press during the late 1980s had not irrevocably tarnished Stalin’s image. To this day, I can still vividly recall the posters of Stalin’s smiling face hoisted above a sea of red flags on the vastness of Palace Square. I remember asking myself how so many people could be cheering a man who had murdered millions and terrorized millions more of their compatriots. I also remember thinking that this was a very bad omen for the future of the Russian people.

On a bitterly cold morning thirteen years later, I stood on Leninskiy Prospect in the Siberian town of Tomsk watching a parade of Communists and sympathizers as they commemorated the day of the Bolshevik Revolution. This time I was not surprised to see several posters of Stalin being carried by the participants, but I was still curious: How

---

1 An event no longer officially commemorated by the state, although the parade had policemen escorting it, which would indicate knowledge and assent on the part of authorities about its occurrence.
could the image of Stalin continue to hold such power for the Russian people? How could it be that Stalin’s popularity was not only condoned in Russian society, but had seemingly increased in the intervening years?

During my travels to Russia in 2002 and 2003, I occasionally ran across clues to the mystery of Stalin’s popularity. Some of this obviously had to do with positive associations with the Soviet past: One of my Russian friend’s grandfathers—a veteran of the Battle of Stalingrad—had a framed portrait of him on his bedroom dresser, and postcards and posters of Stalin (always in uniform) began appearing in bookstores and kiosks. As I began to study Stalinism, and had personal experiences with the discourse of the Stalinist period, however, it became clear to me that the popularity of Stalin was not simply a fondness for an era of greatness, a pining for the trappings of empire. There was a discursive component to this resurgent popularity facilitated by the political elite in Russia, and that discourse seemed to glorify Stalin at the expense of the memory of those who perished because of him. In my experience, this was a new phenomenon that had come about in the years since Vladimir Putin became leader of Russia. This realization was to stir what was to become the central question of this study: How do the political elite control the discourse on the Stalinist period and what are the implications of that control?² The answer to this question, as we shall see, is that the political elite are working to influence the way Russians view the Soviet past. So let us turn to the explanatory model suggested by the research conducted for this study, and then apply it specifically to the Russian case.

---

² I use the term ‘control’ because that is the term used by the main scholars on the subject of discourse, especially as it relates to power (see van Dijk 2009; 2008; 1993; Fairclough 1992a; 1992b).
In this study, I examine how political elites control and manipulate discourse for political purposes. The data collected and analyzed for this study suggest the following:

1. The presence of a previous regime of long duration that used political violence and repression on a massive scale, particularly in the first half of the regime’s existence.

2. The absence of any sustained sort of judicial mechanism to address the crimes of the previous regime in the new one.

3. This lack of transitional justice allows nostalgia for the prior regime to develop, and this nostalgia is unconcerned with historical accuracy or factual data. Damaging facts are bowdlerized from the historical narrative of the prior regime. This narrative is friendly to the discursive preferences of the political elite in the new regime.

4. A strong state that emerged from the ashes of the old, which is dominated by political elites with the resources to manipulate or co-opt multiple avenues of discourse formulation and dissemination in society.

5. A political elite with the capacity to co-opt legitimate nostalgia and advance narratives that manipulate the historical narrative in ways that bolster and perpetuate their own political preferences.

In the Russian case, the state utilizes both what is traditionally thought of as co-optation, and a "preventive co-optation" in order to accomplish the latter two items in the above model. I refer to the combination of these two forms of co-optation as "complex
co-optation." This encompasses the range of co-optation and discourse manipulation strategies detailed throughout this study.

Co-optation is generally thought of as the introduction of fresh elements into a (usually oppositional) group or organization with the intent to modify or alter its original mission or orientation (see Coy and Hedeen 2005; Bertocchi and Spagat 2001; Selznick 1949). "Preventive co-optation" describes a form of co-optation that inhibits the emergence of opposition groups in the first place. Preventive co-optation occurs through state control of the civil society sector in which opposition movements might form, and by advancing a discourse that portrays opposition to state policies as unpatriotic and contrary to what the elite characterize as Russia's national interests. In this way, the state inoculates society against the favorable reception of alternative narratives, the state is therefore able to bring the resources of the state to bear in harassing or eliminating challenges to the dominant order without fear of public opprobrium. As one might imagine, such an environment also has a shaping effect on the discursive practices of existing groups that choose to challenge state-sponsored narratives. These groups either modify their stance or risk facing the regulatory apparatus of the state. Russian society, meanwhile, comes under the sway of state discursive control in a way that allows them to view the past fondly while imagining and perhaps hoping that it might become a bigger part of their present.

The chaos and unpredictability of the immediate post-Soviet period led many Russians to feel nostalgic for the comparative stability of the Soviet era. This nostalgia omitted or minimized unpleasant aspects of the Soviet past, and allowed people to take refuge from their problems by imagining their recent past as predictable and glorious.
Political elites in Russia took advantage of this nostalgia and actively worked to construct a historical narrative in line with it, while maneuvering the discourse to portray aspects of the strong centralized state in a positive light. One of the main ways this was achieved was through the rehabilitation of Stalin’s reputation, making him the symbol of the entire Soviet period, and characterizing the Soviet period as an era of Russian greatness. This rehabilitation was achieved by emphasizing certain aspects of Stalin’s rule while minimizing others. In particular, this meant dwelling on and glorifying Stalin’s role as leader of the Soviet Union as it achieved victory over Nazi Germany in the *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna* (Great Patriotic War), as World War II is known in Russian, while marginalizing the discourse on Stalin’s image as the instigator of policies that caused the deaths of millions of innocent Soviet citizens, such as collectivization, the mass executions during the Great Terror, and the rapid industrialization that was achieved in part through the use of forced labor. Using the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, the political elite advance a discourse that glorifies a strong centralized state and justifies the authoritarian measures that the elite have used to achieve it.

By utilizing the considerable resources of the state, and co-opting the legitimate impulse to nostalgia on the part of many Russians, the political elites created specific discursive structures upon which to construct a narrative that implicitly lauds the “power vertical” of the historic centralized state authority. The elite use official media channels and outlets to promote a view of Russian history that is consistent with the current nostalgia for the Soviet period, and have used official and unofficial means to dissuade alternative or contradictory narratives. The elite have also exerted substantial influence over the educational system—especially where the subject of Stalinism is concerned—
variously defining or strongly influencing textbook content and curricula, and reducing the amount of time that teachers may devote to the subject of Stalinism. The state also dominates that process of memorialization, reinforcing a view of history that is consistent with popular nostalgia and with the elite’s own discursive preferences, while minimizing aspects of history that may undermine or contradict these. Finally, utilizing the coercive and regulatory power of the state, the elite have been able to control access to the discourse by actively promoting message-friendly groups, while using formal and informal methods to eliminate or minimize organizations that offer views inconsistent with or contradictory to the elite-driven discourse.

The Marginalized Discourse: The Stalinist Terror

By the time Stalin had consolidated power in the late 1920s, the nascent Soviet system already had an impressive history of political violence. The early Bolshevik government’s first security service, the Cheka, excelled at rooting out opposition—real or imagined—culminating in Lenin’s “Red Terror,” during which hundreds of thousands of Russians, many of whom were relatively wealthy landowning peasants known as “kulaks,” were shot or imprisoned. Lenin also presided over a ruthless persecution of the Orthodox Church in Russia, destroying centuries-old churches, cathedrals and monasteries, and imprisoning or executing priests and monks. It was also under Lenin that the first labor camp—not yet known as a GULAG—was opened in 1923 on the Main Solovetsky Island in the White Sea. This was all done in order to eliminate what Lenin viewed as bourgeois elements in the new worker’s paradise.
After Lenin’s death in 1924, Stalin bested his contemporaries in a resulting power struggle through a series of intrigues, deceptions, and back-room deals. Many of these contemporaries who had opposed Stalin were later tried during the famed Moscow “show trials” during the 1930s—the outcome of which was already predetermined by Stalin—and executed. Stalin believed that the very existence of the fledgling Soviet state was jeopardized by Russia’s backwardness, such as its still largely agrarian society, and he was determined to remedy this (Filippov 2007). To do so, Stalin formulated a series of five-year plans, which set lofty goals for production, development, and industrialization for each in a series of five-year segments. During this time, Stalin continued the violence that Lenin had set in motion from the earliest days of the regime. Archival data show that tens of thousands of people were being executed every year by the late 1920s (Khlevniuk 2004).

In the first of Stalin’s five-year plans, 1931-1936, he ordered the forced collectivization of independent peasant farms into huge collective or state farms, known as kolkhozes or sovkholzes. This was a disastrous policy. Many peasants revolted and burned their farms or killed their livestock in order to resist this order. Collectivization resulted in egregious agricultural inefficiencies that caused a famine in Ukraine during the years 1932-1933, during which almost five million people starved to death or died of disease, many of them children. Peasant revolts and the resulting arrests during this time created a large prison population.

Another watershed event that occurred during this time was the murder of Leningrad Party Secretary Sergei Kirov in 1934. While there is still some controversy among scholars about whether the murder was ordered by Stalin himself (who viewed the
well-liked Kirov as becoming too powerful), what is clear is that this event served as a pretext for the expansion of Stalin’s political violence. Stalin publicly decried Kirov’s murder as evidence of a vast foreign conspiracy—both within Party ranks and among the general populace—bent on the destruction of the new Soviet state. This heralded the beginning of mass political violence, which reached its peak, but not its end, during the Terror in the years 1937-1938. The Great Terror is considered by some historians (e.g. Khlevniuk 2009) to have abated only in 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in late June of that year.

The Stalinist Terror was a prolonged crime against humanity, dwarfing even the Holocaust in its victim tally. Millions of innocent Soviet citizens died in transit and millions perished in the extreme conditions of the camps (Appelbaum 2003; Figes 2007; Khlevnuik 2004). On Stalin’s orders, arrest quotas were determined either by the Politburo or by the head of the security services at the time, the Narodniy Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs), or NKVD, for the regional and district authorities who then filled them (Gregory 2009; Brent 2008; Khlevniuk 2004).

The system of camps which came to be known as the GULAG originated under Lenin in the early years of the Soviet regime, but Stalin greatly expanded the system, creating a directorate from which the acronym comes—the Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerei (Main Directorate of Camps) in April of 1930. The GULAG system eventually consisted of a vast network of camps. Some camps were primarily “corrective labor camps” (isprovitelno-trudovye lagerya) which means that the prisoners were usually forced to work in some sort of long-term activity, such as logging and fishing, in the case
of Solovki on the White Sea, or, in one of the most severe examples, of mining gold in
the brutal winter climate of the Russian Far East at the Kolyma camp near Magadan. In
both cases, prisoners built most of the camp themselves, but prisoners were also often
enlisted to build the cities that provided logistical support to the camps. There are
numerous examples of large Russian cities that were initially built by prisoner labor
(Magadan and Norlisk, are but two such examples).

There were also transit camps, where prisoners were held until they were shipped
to their final destinations. The harsh conditions on transport trains often meant that large
numbers of people died in transit camps (or, more accurately, were discovered to have
perished on the trip at transit camps). Russian poet Osip Mandelstam died in one of these
camps. Finally, in the GULAG system, there were camps that were built for short(er)-
term purposes, often some sort of construction project, such as a railroad or a dam. The
construction of the Belamor Canal is an example of this type.

According to figures from the post-World War II archives of the GULAG,
approximately 20,000,000 people were convicted of crimes for which they were sent to
one of these camps during the period from 1930 to early 1941. An additional 3,000,000
were either exiled or deported (Khlevniuk 2004:328-329). This does not take into
account the families left behind, who were harassed and stigmatized for having a relative
considered to be an "enemy of the people" (vrag naroda), or any of the repressions that
occurred during and after the war.

Executions usually occurred twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the death
sentence was handed down by extrajudicial committees known as ‘troikas.’ Even in the
years before Stalin’s purges began en masse, the number of executions was substantial.
Khlevniuk notes that in 1930, for example, 20,201 people were executed (2004:288). The number of executions skyrocketed in 1937, however, when the Yezhovshchina—named after NKVD head Nikolai Yezhov; also known as the ‘Great Terror’—began in earnest. In the years 1937-1938, Ellman (2002) puts the figure of those executed at between 900,000 and 1.2 million. Gregory notes that “between August 1, 1937 and the end of November 1938, troikas (and other associated extrajudicial tribunals) issued more than fifteen hundred death sentences per day” (2009:207).

The majority of the scholarship regarding the motivation for the Stalinist Terror holds that this was a way for Stalin to consolidate his power absolutely, while ridding society of perceived opponents of the Stalinist regime, and eliminating dissent and even the possibility of dissent. This was considered necessary apparently because there was substantial societal unrest and discontent in the Soviet Union at the time, owing largely to Stalin’s policies of collectivization and rapid industrialization. Opposition and dissent, to Stalin, often consisted of little more than social class, education, or sometimes, poor job performance. The Terror allowed Stalin to consolidate his power, especially at the top, for example, by having virtually all of the old Bolshevik order shot on specious charges, and by cowing (and hobbling) the Soviet military apparatus by ordering the execution of a substantial number of high-ranking officers. But this zeal to eliminate real or imagined enemies of the state was applied to the entire Soviet population. It often did not take much to be considered an enemy of the state under the provisions of the infamous Article 58 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution, which broadened the definition of anti-Soviet activity to the extent that almost anything could be construed to qualify. A Russian historian I spoke to told me, “The one thing you really wanted to be during [the Terror] was average.
You didn’t want to be too good at your job because then your ambition might be suspicious, and you didn’t want to be too bad because you could be considered to be hurting the industrialization effort through incompetence. Either one of these could get you shot.”

While the current historical discourse in Russia often characterizes Stalin’s industrialization campaign as playing a significant role in motivating the Terror, archival evidence does not directly support this. It is true that convict labor played a significant role in the Soviet Union’s industrialization, but the GULAG system struggled with gross inefficiencies, compounded by the fact that “NKVD enterprises were debilitated by the arrests of their leaders, as well as by the emaciation of and high mortality rate among workers” (Khlevniuk 2004:332). Lastly, of course, shooting a million able-bodied men and women does not make good economic sense. Scholars note that political considerations overrode economic ones in the implementation of the Stalinist Terror (Gregory 2009; Khlevniuk 2004).

While news of what was happening made its way gradually into Soviet society at the time, it was a dark secret that no one dared talk about openly. The NKVD had an extensive network of informers, and being denounced by one’s neighbor was often enough to warrant a knock on the door by NKVD thugs in the middle of the night. After Stalin’s death, Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalinism at the 20th Party Congress in 1956 brought discussion of the Terror into the open, but only partly (Smith 1996). It was not until the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961 that the Terror was discussed in greater detail (Satter 2012; Smith 1996). But even then, there were substantial omissions of fact.

---

3 Throughout this study, I quote sources whose identifying characteristics I cannot reveal under the terms of my Institutional Review Board agreement in obtaining a waiver of documented informed consent.
about the political repression of the Stalin era. The fear on the part of the political leadership was that a complete revelation of the nature and scope of these repressions (and of the policies of collectivization) would discredit the Soviet system entirely. There was also hesitancy on the part of the political elite to reveal their own complicity in the repressions (see especially Adler 2002; also Smith 1996; Riazanovsky 1993; Tucker 1987). The return of prisoners amnestied or rehabilitated during this period bore witness to the horrors of the Stalinist period (Applebaum 2003; Adler 1999; Cohen 2009; Dobson 2001). Anti-Stalinist sentiment burgeoned in the Soviet Union. But it was not to last. By 1964, a year after the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s masterful depiction of life in the GULAG, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Khrushchev was ousted and Stalin’s reputation was rehabilitated under Brezhnev (Tucker 1987). It was not until the coming of glasnost during the later years of the Soviet Union that stories of the terror, torture and death of the Stalinist period would again appear in the Soviet press regularly (Smith 1996). This time, there was no holding back information as had occurred under Khrushchev; this time the totality and enormity of Stalin’s crimes were on display for the world to see.

In addition to the revelations of Stalinist era horrors in the years 1988-1990, there have been numerous memoirs of Stalinist persecution and repression published in the post-Soviet period (e.g. Courtois et al., 1999, Hollander 2006). There have also been numerous scholarly publications using archival data to demonstrate the extent of Stalin’s crimes (Brent 2008; Khlevniuk 2004; 2009; Getty and Naumov 1999; Gregory 2009).

There was, however, no systematic effort to address this aspect of the Soviet past in

---

4 The term “rehabilitated” has a legal connotation in Russia, meaning that a person was found not to have been guilty of the crime for which they were imprisoned or executed. The term thus applies to both the living and the dead.
Russia, there were no mechanisms of transitional justice, such as a truth commission. Nor was there any effort to hold anyone accountable. The post-Soviet Russian government made a blanket effort to contact families to inform them that their long-missing relatives were dead (most often a letter stating simply that they had died at the GULAG in which they were incarcerated while omitting the cause of death). But most of the families who lost loved ones during the purges have never received any physical remains (Merridale 2000). Their relatives remain missing to this day.

The failure to come to terms with this aspect of the Soviet past has had a significant impact on Russian society today. It has allowed nostalgia for the favorable aspects of the Stalinist period, such as stability and military might, to develop. This has been both abetted and manipulated by the political elite. It has allowed people in official positions to deny the importance, and even the existence, of the massive political violence that occurred under Stalin with impunity (Etkind 2004). School textbooks portray Stalin in positive terms (Fillipov 2007; Danilov et al. 2009), and derogatory information about Stalin is viewed negatively—sometimes very negatively—by many Russians. This is perhaps less indicative of positive feelings about Stalin than it is a respect on the part of many Russians for the powerful state that he led, and the feeling that this legacy should remain unmolested. As a former dissident said to me: “It isn’t that Russians like the Stalinists, but they like the anti-Stalinists even less.”

The Dominant Discourse of Stalinism in Russia Today
Stalin is a popular figure in Russia today. In 2005, a survey conducted by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion found that “42 percent of the Russian people wanted the return of a ‘leader like Stalin’ (60 percent of the respondents over sixty years of age were in favour of a ‘new Stalin’)” (Figes 2007:641). Other polls show that Russians, especially Russian youth, are uninformed about, or have ambivalent attitudes towards, the crimes of the Stalinist period (Mendelson and Gerber 2005).

Current positive portrayals of the Soviet past rely heavily on the narrative of the Great Patriotic War as an accomplishment indicative of what a strong Russian state can achieve. The Russian government, belatedly under Yeltsin (see Smith 2002), and aggressively under Putin and now Medvedev, has exploited and is exploiting the tendency of society to focus on positive and heroic events, especially the Soviet victory in World War II, in its effort to re-shape the historical discourse of the Soviet period in general (Kucherenko 2011; Gudkov 2005; Forest and Johnson 2002; Merridale 2002). The Soviet victory is the most potent symbol of positive aspects of the Soviet Union, and by extension Russia (Roginsky 2008; Smith 2002). However, the societal discourse about the Soviet experience in World War II minimizes or glosses over negative aspects of the war. The current discourse, for example, has completely eliminated the fact that Stalin was so shocked by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 that he had a kind of nervous breakdown and withdrew to his dacha outside Moscow for several days while the Nazis advanced rapidly. His absence directly contributed to the early Nazi successes, because the Soviet system was so centralized around Stalin that scarcely anything could be done without his order (Khlevniuk 2009). This was why the Soviet military apparatus had not mobilized until well after it was obvious that the German invasion was under way
Stalin apparently believed that the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact he and Hitler agreed to would be honored by the Nazi leader. Stalin appears to have clung to this belief despite substantial evidence to the contrary. For example, he assiduously ignored his own (accurate) intelligence that essentially laid out the entire plan for Operation Barbarossa, as the Soviet invasion was known to the German military. This aspect of the war is completely absent from the narrative evidence. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is portrayed in school history textbooks as a positive thing, with Stalin portrayed as having craftily bought the Soviet Union extra time to prepare for the coming war. There are other aspects of the war’s conduct that are similarly minimized or justified in the war narrative, such as the Stalinist purges’ deleterious effects on the Red Army’s officer corps (Yakovlev 1997; Conquest 1990), the use of unarmed or under-equipped GULAG prisoners in NKVD “punishment battalions,” and the deportation of non-Russian peoples during the war (Lynch 2005; Forest and Johnson 2002). In general, historical accounts of the Soviet war experience downplay the violence and repression of the Soviet system.

There is also a compartmentalization that occurs with the more brutal aspects of the Stalinist period. Many of the Russians I interviewed saw the Terror either as an unfortunate by-product of industrialization, or as a tragedy for which they have only vague explanations. They talked about the deaths of millions of their fellow countrymen as if they had occurred in some tragic natural disaster as opposed to being the purposeful acts of Stalin and the political elite.
An Illustration: Conversations on a Train

On a train ride from St. Petersburg to the White Sea coastal town of Kem, I talked at length with a couple in their late 50s about the Soviet period. The subject came up as they were relating tales of their recent trip to Belarus, whence they were now returning, to the fourth passenger in our berth, a woman in her early 40s: “You should see it. The streets are so clean; the shops are cheap and there are plenty of goods. And everybody works!”

The couple’s enthusiasm for Belarus’ Soviet-style authoritarian system led to an hour-long reminiscence about the pleasant aspects of the Soviet period, particularly about how there was order and “things got done.” As an example of the latter, the older woman had noticed that one of the horizontal windows in our compartment that opens to the outside was stuck slightly ajar, allowing a small draft of cold air to come in. The couple had already complained about this to our provodnitsa (the railway service woman in charge of our carriage), and she had promised to have someone look at it. This was about an hour and a half prior, and the wife was plainly unhappy about the slow response time in dealing with the problem.

“This would never happen [in Soviet times]. This would have been fixed immediately.”

The younger woman agreed, and said to the older woman, “You know, I was never offended by Soviet power—I didn’t suffer. I know about the dissidents, but I didn’t

---

5 Several Russians who have read this draft have noted that this is an example of fond remembrance, not of the way things actually were during the Soviet period, and are of the opinion that in fact, problems such as these were much less likely to be addressed speedily than in Russia today.
associate with them (обшчалас). How many of them were there?” She then looked at me and said, “I think there are a lot of people who were happy with the old days.”

I sat and listened. Everyone seemed happy to talk about the subject, and the conversation was lively. At one point, I asked if perhaps there were aspects of the Soviet system that they did not miss. The elder woman waved her hand dismissively, saying: “Then you couldn’t criticize the government, but you knew that you had a job, you knew what would happen when you went on pension. Now you can criticize the government and what do we have? You never know what’s going to happen. The [economic] crisis, corruption—everything is about money. I would prefer not to be able to criticize the government and know what to expect.”

After some time, while drinking tea and sharing open-faced salami and butter sandwiches that the couple provided, the husband asked me where I was traveling to. When I told him I was going to Solovki (where the first Soviet GULAG camp was located), he asked why, at which point I told everyone a bit about my research and why I was going there. The couple seemed very eager to help me. The woman brought up the Soviet songwriter, Vladimir Vysotskiy, who sang and wrote poems about Solovki, suggesting that I might find something useful in the lyrics. Everyone seemed to think that my research was very interesting.

Apparently taking a cue from my research interests, the conversation then turned to personal experiences of political repression. The wife told a rather lengthy story about her Ukrainian grandfather who was arrested and shot for being a kulak in the late 1920s. Her father, aunts and uncles then had quite a difficult time as he and they had been labeled the sons and daughters of an enemy of the people. Several of these relatives
starved to death during the famine that collectivization produced in 1932-1933. It was also difficult for the surviving siblings to get educational and employment opportunities. Her grandfather was later rehabilitated during the Khrushchev years, and so her father ended up learning a trade and eventually obtaining employment. When speaking of that time, and of Stalin’s collectivization in the late 1920s and early 1930s, she seemed frustrated: “My grandfather had a bit of land and a horse, and he had a plough, so perhaps he had a bit of grain. So they come and take the grain. But then they come and take the horse! What good is that? It’s crazy.”

Each person then told a story about a relative who had suffered under Stalin. The husband’s grandfather spent ten years in a camp; the other woman’s great-uncle was arrested and shot upon returning from the war. Yet each of these people had, not an hour before, been fondly reminiscing about, if not advocating a return to, the past. I found this to be a fairly common phenomenon. People would disassociate the later Soviet period from the earlier period in which the majority of political violence and repression occurred under Lenin and Stalin. They did not view the later Soviet period as a continuation of the same system that had produced the Terror.

The above is illustrative of several features of the dominant narrative of political repression in Russia. For one, the focus is on political repression that occurred under Stalin—the Terror. While Lenin is also brought into the narrative on occasion, it is never in as forceful a manner as the representation of Stalin as the key figure responsible for the purges, extra-judicial (or quasi-judicial) executions, and the establishment of the GULAG system of forced labor camps throughout the Soviet Union. In particular, this means the years of the Yezhovshchina (named after the head of the Soviet security services at the
time, Nikolai Yezhov): 1937-1938. Solzhenitsyn, writing in the 1960s, could just as well be writing about Russia today:

When people today decry the abuses of the cult, they keep getting hung up on those years which are stuck in our throats, ’37 and ’38. And memory begins to make it seems as though no arrests were made before or after, but only in those two years [emphasis in the original] (1973:24).

For the majority of the Russians with whom I spoke, political repression not only meant that which occurred under Stalin, but that which occurred long ago, a part of some ancient history that they were too young to have lived through or too old to have been taught about. This is a perception that is condoned by the political elite today. What is kept fresh in the minds of Russians are the achievements that occurred during Stalin’s leadership, especially the development of industry prior to the war, not the repressive policies that helped make them possible.

Another common thread that I found in my conversations with Russians about the Stalinist period was that the Great Patriotic War always seemed to be lurking in the background. Conversations that began with political repression tended to drift into a discussion of the war. Stalin was the bridge that connected these topics. But Stalin could not exist as the figurehead of Soviet greatness if it were not for the war. And victory in the war is a key component in fond remembrance of the Soviet period; indeed, it was such a monumental achievement that it is difficult to conceptualize Russian national identity without it. As Fofanova and Morozov note

Given the foundational significance of the Great Patriotic War narrative, any recognition of the negative role played by the Soviet Union in the history of the Second World War would involve reconfiguring the whole groundwork of Russian national identity construction (2009:27).
The collective memory of the Great Patriotic War is indispensable to understanding why it has displaced political terror as the overarching traumatic event in Russian historical discourse. The current hegemony of the discourse on the war has come to incorporate the Stalinist Terror as an unfortunate but necessary phenomenon that was required in order for the Soviet Union to industrialize and modernize in advance of the coming war. That is, the Terror was a necessary step for the Soviet Union if it was to be able to defeat the Nazi invaders. The Russian idiom “when one chops wood, chips fly” (*les rubyat—*shchepki letyat), was the response I received on several occasions when asking Russians why the Terror had occurred.

**Setting the Parameters**

*Human Right Abuses and Political Repression*

While there were many examples of egregious human rights abuses during the Stalinist period, in this study I am focusing primarily on discourse surrounding the early Stalinist period, and especially the years 1937-1938, variously known as the Terror, the Great Terror, or the *Yezhovshchina*. I chose this period in large part because it is the era that Russians understand as “political repression.” This was also the time when the Stalinist state reached its zenith of centralized control. As Khlevniuk (2009) puts it, “The large-scale operations of 1937 and 1938 were a clear demonstration of the essence and capabilities of the Stalinist dictatorship, which achieved its full powers with the onset of

---

6 The famine of 1932-1933, for example, is usually viewed as a separate event, and is less often characterized as repression, per se.
the Great Terror” (xxi). I also chose the discourse surrounding the period of the Terror because it is this discourse specifically that has been most directly manipulated by the political elite in Russia. The discourse on the Terror has been subsumed into the discourse of the Great Patriotic War as a necessary but unfortunate policy that was required for the Soviet Union to industrialize quickly in order to be able to fight the Nazis, whose invasion was still some three years away. While many of the policies initiated or implemented under Stalin led to the deaths of millions of people (for example the forced collectivization of agriculture and postwar repressions), they are not the main features of the discourse about political repression under Stalin in Russia today.

Discursive portrayals of post-Stalin era abuses are outside the scope of this study. While some scholars assert that the Stalinist period was merely a part of an oppressive Soviet system that had ebbs and flows (see Applebaum 2003, for example), the repression of the Stalinist period was characterized by unpredictable and egregious violence, in contrast to the more muted and predictable nature of political repression under successive Soviet leaders. Phenomena such as psychiatric detention, the dissident movement, and forced exile, while important, do not appear in the narrative evidence of political repression in Russia, even when the subject is political repression. Further, there are no monuments or memorials dedicated to this specific period of Soviet history. Finally, these subjects are also not currently part of the curriculum in the Russian educational system.\(^7\)

---

\(^7\) Because these are the measures I use to demonstrate the control and manipulation of discourse by the political elite, I have excluded post-Stalinist political repression from this study.
In this study I employ a constructivist conceptualization of power, and I focus on a particular aspect of power, which is the ability of the state to control the discourse of a particular period of Russian history. Van Dijk refers to this as “symbolic power,” which is the power wielded by those who control the means of disseminating discourse (2008:12-14). This is a component part of the Gramscian notion of “cultural hegemony,” wherein society comes to believe that its interests are also those of the political elite (Gramsci 1971; van Dijk 2008; Gaventa 2000). It is not the heavy-handed discourse control that characterized the Soviet state, however. Gone is the ubiquitous propaganda glorifying socialism and the October Revolution.

In Russia today, control of the discourse happens subtly, and positive portrayals of the Stalinist past are not solely a top-down affair (Sherlock 2007a). The political elite play on a widespread and deep nostalgia for the Soviet period, of which Stalin is now symbolic. This nostalgia arose both from disillusionment and frustration about Russia’s faltering early attempts at democratization, which produced chaotic and unstable political, economic, and social conditions, and from a ‘national identity crisis’, that came about with the sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union and the lack of a subsequently emergent post-Soviet Russian national identity (Sherlock 2007a; Smith 2002). The subtlety of discourse manipulation does not make it less significant, however. Lukes (1974) notes that this variant of power need not be total:

To put the matter sharply, A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing,

---

8 Of course, all discourse, to some extent, “shapes, and is shaped by society” (Fairclough 1992:8). One of the underlying assumptions of this study is that in an authoritarian context, society’s input into the process is curtailed.
shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have—that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires? One does not need to go to the lengths of talking about Brave New World or B.F. Skinner, to see this: thought control takes many less total and more mundane forms, through the control of information, through the mass media and through processes of socialization (23).

Van Dijk (2008) similarly argues that the very subtlety of discourse manipulation obviates more overt forms of power: “Control of public discourse is control of the mind of the public, and hence, indirectly, control of what the public wants and does. One needs no coercion if one can persuade, seduce, indoctrinate, or manipulate people” (14). Indeed, the very subtlety of the phenomenon makes it perhaps even more pernicious than the types of discourse control witnessed during the Soviet period. The Soviet variant was, by the mid-1970s, at least recognizable as myth (Tucker 1987).

So there are both top-down and bottom-up explanations for why the discourse of the Stalinist period looks as it does in Russia today. But the role of nostalgia needs to be viewed contextually. And while a certain degree of nostalgia has arisen due to the exigencies of post-Soviet life in Russia, it has also been actively cultivated by the political elite since the early 2000s (Lee 2011; Smith 2002; Sherlock 2007a: Mendelson and Gerber 2006).

One of the main schools of thought about Russia that is weakened by the findings in this study is that there is some masochistic need on the part of Russians to be dominated by a strong state; that Russians are somehow not culturally “cut out for” democracy (see, for example, Brzezinski 2000; Sergeyev and Biryukov 1993). I will show that Russians have made and are making understandable choices given their recent historical experience and the lenses through which they view them. Russians’ perceptions
are necessarily colored by the fact that there has never been an attempt to reckon with the
darker side of Russia’s Soviet past, and as long as this is the case Russia’s future
democratic prospects are grim (Adler 2005; Kramer 2001). Russians today may be more
susceptible to manipulation by the political elite, but that has occurred more out of
nostalgia for a past with which they were familiar and that they view fondly—born of
fear and uncertainty about a present that they do not—than some cultural deficiency, or a
cultural predisposition to be repressed.

On the other hand, the political elite in Russia may have some predisposition to
control the discourse of Soviet history. In his work on historical narratives of the Soviet
and post-Soviet period, Sherlock notes that two groups who were most damaged by the
historical revelations during the late Soviet period, the military and the security services,
“took revenge in post-Soviet Russia, attempting to resacralize the Soviet past to provide
symbolic support for their values and interests. Paradoxically, these efforts were largely
approved in large part by Russian society when only years earlier it had condemned the
Soviet system” (2007a:1). Almost immediately after Putin became President of the
Russian Federation he appointed a large number of current and former security services
personnel to his administration (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003; Bremmer and Charap
2007; Treisman 2007; Kramer 2001). These men had their formative experiences in the
Soviet period and there is a clear nationalistic component to the ideology of this group,
which has come to be known as the ‘siloviki’ (or “strong ones”) in Russia. Treisman,
argues that in a system where such men are in control, their “ready access to tools of
surveillance and intimidation predispose them to tighten administrative control”
Not only has the political elite under both Putin and Medvedev tightened administrative control, they have also co-opted many of the mechanisms through which discourse is disseminated, by bringing a substantial number of media outlets under their authority. In 2001, the state natural gas monopoly, Gazprom, seized Vladimir Gusinsky’s media empire, which included the formerly independent NTV television network (Lynch 2005; Hoffman 2003). It also closed down or took over “a number of television and radio companies whose independence was deemed intolerable by the Kremlin” (Sherlock 2007a:183). A few years later, it also took control of the VTsIOM polling organization, forcing its head and founder, Yuri Levada, to resign (Sherlock 2007a).

We will return to a discussion of the political elite subsequently. At present, suffice it to say that, very early on, the political elite in Russia recognized the utility of controlling the means of distributing discourse. While the characteristics of the elite may have determined the method, more important for this study is that they determined what the discourse of the Stalinist period should be.

Research Design and Method

This study is a multi-method case study of Russia. The case study was most appropriate given that this research entailed multiple variables, and the dynamics of the interaction between them were not immediately clear (Yin 1989; 2003). Because the main issue at hand is one of control of the historical discourse by the political elite in Russia, this was a phenomenon that was specific to that particular case (Stake 1995),
owing to the particular social and political circumstances in Russia that had fostered nostalgia for the Soviet period. Finally, case studies are appropriate when asking how or why questions, as is the case with this research (Yin 1989).

I chose the multi-method approach because the analysis of different, but complementary, phenomena required partaking of what Almond refers to metaphorically as “the great cafeteria of the center” (1988:830)—that is, methodological pluralism instead of strict adherence to one methodological school of thought. I allowed the particulars of the phenomenon I was studying to determine the methodology employed. For example, in Chapter 2, where I discuss why the discourse looks the way it does today, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA), which looks at the ways that discourse perpetuates, and determines, power relationships in society (Fairclough 1992; van Dijk, 2008; 2009). As part of this, I detail the composition of the political elite in Russia (those who have the greatest degree of access to and control over the discourse) and the ‘symbolic power’ that this gives them (van Dijk 2008). I also examine the role of nostalgia to determine its role in facilitating the dominance of the discourse as it came to be (Boym 2001; Oushakine 2000). In Chapter 4, however, the chapter discussing memorials and the processes of memorialization, I rely heavily on Geertz’s (1973) “thick description” to tell the story of the individual memorials and the experience of actually visiting them. Grounding my observation in the relevant literature of the academy, and employing narratives from interview subjects, media accounts and printed materials available at these sites, allows the triangulation of the data and ensures methodological rigor.

9 Although these may be generalizable to other societies (see Stake 1995).
10 A further consideration was that prominent CDA scholars such as van Dijk (2008) recommend a pluralist methodological approach.
Data Collection

I spent three months in the field, primarily in St. Petersburg, but also in the cities of Novgorod, Perm, Tomsk, the Solovetsky Islands, and Moscow, conducting interviews and visiting GULAG and killing field sites, as well as Patriotic War memorials. These sites included the secret NKVD burial site at Levashovo, outside St. Petersburg; the Butovo killing field outside Moscow; the first Soviet GULAG on the Main Solovetsky Island in the White Sea; the punishment camp at Sekirnaya Gora, also on the Solovetsky Islands; the last Soviet strict regime labor camp at Perm-36; Poklonnaya Gora in Moscow; Piskarevskoye Cemetery (where victims of the Leningrad blockade are buried) as well as several museums and other memorials to either the GULAG or the Great Patriotic War.

In the field I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with Russians. The formal interviews were with dissidents, several schoolteachers and professors, an actress, a doctor, and several construction workers, among others. Additionally, I conducted several in-depth interviews with high-level members of the Memorial International human rights organization. Because I felt that it was important to get the perspective of less-sophisticated Russians who did not live in an urban environment, most of the informal interviews were conducted during my travels outside of major cities.

I read newspapers assiduously, and watched television for at least several hours in the evening, if I was not traveling. In particular, I was looking at how much print space and air time was devoted to the Great Patriotic War and the Stalinist terror, respectively.
It seemed logical to me that these would provide a kind of ‘barometer’ about the current discourse on the history of the Stalinist period. It also allowed me to examine the difference between the two.

I collected whatever materials were available at the various museums and memorials to the war and to the Terror. This often meant purchasing the materials in question, so these may not have been available to everyone. I also visited every bookstore that I came across, and several that I made special trips to, and spent time perusing the selection of books available in the history sections. My intent was to determine how much information was available on the war and on political repression, and of that, how much was legitimate scholarship, as opposed to some of the quasi-historical texts I had encountered.

**Situating the Main Argument of This Study**

In this study, I am seeking to contribute to three specific literatures, in addition to the literature on Russia. The first is that of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and its focus on the relationship between discourse and power. The second is that of collective memory, which may be called the societal outcome of discourse manipulation. While this manipulation occurs to some extent in all societies, in the case of Russia I am arguing that it has had implications perhaps more deleterious and far-reaching than in democratic regimes, because it is being used to glorify a repressive authoritarian system. The third literature is that of memorialization, which may be seen as the physical manifestation of discourse control. I argue that, with the process of memorialization having been co-opted
by the political elite in Russia, that physical memorials reflect this. There is a substantial degree of overlap in the processes I am analyzing, so the distinction between the literatures is less strict than the categories I have assigned to them above.

**Discourse, Myth, and Narrative**

Antonio Gramsci (1971) provided the seminal literature on the notion of ‘cultural hegemony’ and control of discourse. At the time of his writing in the early 1920s, Gramsci was interested in why the other European proletariats did not rise up simultaneously with the Russian revolution in 1917. What he concluded is that the West had established a cultural hegemony in not just Europe, but in the world’s culture (1971). It was possible to break the hold of Western culture, but it required the use of all available means, in establishing a country’s own hegemonic culture. Gramsci believed that the portrayal, or presentation, of this ‘new’ culture “must succeed in giving formal elaboration to the collective doctrine in the most relevant fashion” (Gramsci 1971:340-341). Such an overarching goal as the transformation of culture required that co-optation occur at several junctures simultaneously. For Gramsci, this involved the full mobilization of the educational system (both public and private schools and universities), the Church, the media and all institutions where “cultural activity” occurs (1971:342).

Gramsci was advocating co-optation of the institutions that preserve the dominance of Western culture as a means of achieving the possibility of a revolutionary proletariat. That is to say, Gramsci viewed the transformation of culture as necessary for achieving *political* goals. This is consistent with Selznick’s definition of co-optation, in
his seminal work on the subject, as “the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to the organization’s stability or existence” (1949:4). Co-optation may occur in any circumstance where there is an imbalance of power and an actor that challenges the hegemony of the dominant power emerges (Coy and Hedeen 2005; Bertocchi and Spagat 2001). Political objectives, however, such as the maintainence of the current power structure, require that specific institutions be co-opted. Of particular import are institutions that serve as mechanisms for transmitting discourse, such as the media (Kucherenko 2011, Oates 2007, Man Chan and Lee 1991) and the educational sphere (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Gramsci 1971).

Gramsci’s work describes the ways the state may actively work to control culture by co-opting institutions, re-interpreting collective memory and historical discourse, and then disseminating this appropriated discourse. The civil society sector is an important venue in which this occurs. In discussing how to provide unity in the various disparate elements of Marxism, for example, he notes that, in terms of politics, the state must maintain control over civil society; that success in achieving unity is dependent upon “the intervention of the State (centralized will) to educate the educator, [and] the social environment in general” (1971:403).

The civil society sector in Russia has also been the focus of a preemptive dimension of co-optation. This has occurred along two main axes: the first is the creation of formal state-controlled arenas (e.g. the Civic Forum and Public Chamber) within which civil society organizations are required to operate. By controlling the structural environment from which opposition movements might emerge, the political elite in
Russia preemptively eliminate or mitigate new threats to the discourse and bolster the dominant order. Building on Horvath’s concept of “preventive counter-revolution” (2011:1) in his description of the state’s measures to counter pro-democracy movements in Russia, I use the term ‘preventive co-optation’ to describe this phenomenon. The second axis is the co-optation of nostalgia for the Soviet period, which is then reconfigured and transmitted in society as a means of chilling reception to any alternative narrative. As Coy and Hedeen note in their study of social movement co-optation, “Political opportunities are often present for challenging movements when events or broad social processes occur which undermine the assumptions on which the political status quo is reliant” (2005:413). By controlling and manipulating the contours of nostalgia, the political elite are able to inoculate society against narratives that are not consistent with the elites’ discursive preferences, and foster the perception of groups that advance them as being detrimental to Russia's national interests. For example, in the case that a challenging movement is able to remain viable in such an environment, elites may bring the regulatory power of the state to bear in eliminating it, without incurring political consequences. Conversely, elites may privilege message-friendly groups that promote the interests of the ruling elite.

The civil society sector is simultaneously subjected to the more traditional form of co-optation, i.e. the introduction of new elements that alter the fundamental outcomes of a group or institution that challenges the status quo (Coy and Hedeen 2005). The Kremlin has created faux opposition parties that give the appearance of pluralism in the political landscape (March 2009), and similarly to that created organizations in the civil society sector that appear to be NGOs, but which are in fact proxies for state policy promotion
(Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). I use the term 'complex co-optation' to describe these two forms of co-optation operating in tandem.

John Gaventa (1980) builds on the Gramscian notions of co-optation and elite control over discourse and how it is used to make the disenfranchised “quiescent” in his examination of Appalachian miners and the ways that they are controlled and manipulated by the mine-owning elite. His findings speak to implications for the power of the state in Russia and its ability to control discourse. In Gaventa’s example, it is mine owners—in collusion with politicians and union leaders—who possess the overwhelming resources to co-opt institutions and control discourse within the mining community to such an extent that the workers come to believe that they share interests with the mine owners. In other words, the miners assume the interests of the elite as their own. This is an example of the end-stage outcome of discursive manipulation that may occur when a more powerful institution is able to achieve total control over another population in society.

The contemporary discourse scholarship posits that discourse is controlled by the segment of the population that has access to its formulation (van Dijk 2008; 2006a). This most often means that the political elite, by virtue of its access to forms of formulation and dissemination of discourse, is able to dominate the discourse through what van Dijk calls “symbolic power” (2008:14). The objective is (usually) to reproduce structures that perpetuate this dominance. Further, dominance is often legitimized through the use of discourse about a particular historical event, usually one that has resonance with the majority, in order to justify, rationalize, and perpetuate the structures of dominance (Fairclough 1992a; van Dijk 1993). Van Dijk notes that this entails the use of cognitive
‘models,’ or “mental representations of experiences, events, or situation, as well as the opinions we have about them” in determining how events are portrayed (van Dijk 1993:258). This study contributes to the CDA literature by demonstrating the use of the Great Patriotic War discourse as one of the “knowledge structures,” or “scripts,” (van Dijk 1993:257) used by the political elite to manipulate social cognition of the past—that is, emphasizing one aspects of a historical event (victory in the Patriotic War) to the detriment of another (the Terror). Additionally, this study contributes to the growing number of country case studies on the phenomenon of discourse control.

While the CDA literature provides the theoretical underpinnings to apply it to specific case studies, the manipulation of historical discourse—and especially its utility in providing an ideological foundation for political agendas—is an understudied area of Russian politics. Forney’s analysis of the presentation of the October Revolution as the linchpin that served to provide what Sherlock calls a “symbolic bond” between Soviet society and the Communist Party is one of the few works directly addressing the subject of discourse control and manipulation.

It is strange that this should be so. The Soviet Union, and indeed, countries under the sway of Soviet domination, were well known for contrived versions of history and ubiquitous propaganda. Smith noted in 1989, that “[a]lthough all accounts of history involve a degree of selection and emphasis, Marxist states are unique among modern nations for engaging in the systematic elimination and fabrication of elements of the historical record” (85, 86).

Russia’s return to authoritarianism has given impetus to several works on the discourse of the Soviet period as it applies to power and control. Sherlock’s (2007a) work
on Soviet and post-Soviet historical narratives is one of these. While it focuses more on
the metanarratives of each period in a transitional context rather than the manipulation of
particular narratives with specific intentions, it is useful for the theoretical application of
how narratives are altered and the role of the political elite in this alteration.

Sherlock argues that a society’s identity of self is influenced by perceptions of the
past, and that these are “strongly influenced by … public and private narratives”
(2007a:2). He divides these representations of the past into the categories of ‘history’ and
‘political myth,’ the latter of these “provides structure and content to symbolic discourse”
(2007a:3). Noting that human beings are “predisposed to embrace explanations that
provide order and purpose in a complex world marked by ambiguity,” these myths are
powerful conveyors of a polity’s symbolic identity (Sherlock 2007a:6).

For this reason, regimes attempt to control the content and distribution of political
myth. Sherlock asserts that, while all regimes minimize unpleasant aspects of history in
discourse while mythologizing other aspects, authoritarian regimes tend to have more at
stake in controlling political myths because they rely on them to a greater extent than
democratic regimes for legitimacy (see also Burawoy and Lukacs 1992; Verdery 1991).
A consequence of this, he argues, is that if a regime is able to sufficiently control
discourse in a society—and to eliminate opportunities to oppose it—an individual who
wishes to oppose the established order of things must oppose both the “state and society”
(2007a:12; emphasis in the original). Confronted with such obstacles, many people
simply become quiescent and accede to the wishes of the state (Sherlock 2007a).

Sherlock suggests that the control of historical discourse has implications beyond
the regime’s maintenance of the status quo. Describing the phenomenon of “self-
defeating myths,” he explains that tightly-controlled regimes often experience “systemic pathologies that resemble amnesia and limit developmental capacity. This loss of memory is ‘structural,’ because it is the byproduct of the political structures that limit entry to, and control behavior in the public sphere, thereby blocking the emergence of competing historical perspectives” (2007a:13).

Collective Memory

Conceptually, I employ the scholarship of sociologists and philosophers on the notions of discourse, memory, and the ways that societies collectively understand the past (Halbwachs 1992; Nora 1996; Ricoeur 2004). Connecting this scholarship to the CDA literature enhances the validity of this study, by showing how discourse works to shape and distort perceptions of historical events (Fairclough 1992a; van Dijk 1993). It also establishes a more direct link between collective memory and discourse and how the latter affects the former.

Halbwachs’s (1992) work on the social constructions of collective memory is important for understanding how collective memory differs among different segments of the population and hence, is both subjective and selective. This determines, for example, which events are memorialized and which are allowed to be forgotten. This has obvious implications for examining the discourse on the Soviet period in Russian history, because it is political elites who select what is important to remember (van Dijk 2008; 2006a; 2006b; 1993; Forest and Johnson 2002). Nora (1996) similarly, notes the importance of
the political elite in transforming how collective memory is portrayed and how it is perceived in society.

Halbwachs asserts that it is not possible to divorce personal memory from collective memory because collective memories consist of “a combination of frameworks” that an individual is surrounded by every day (1992:168,169). The Russian government since the Putin regime has striven to construct such frameworks. First it has done this by controlling historical accounts published in the press (Lynch 2005; MacKinnon 2007; Politkovskaya 2004). Second, the government influences how historical events are portrayed in Russian popular culture, such as movies and television programs (Kucherenko 2011; Mereu 2008). Finally, the Putin era witnessed the instauration of such Soviet trappings as parading heavy military equipment through Red Square (Aksyonov 2008) and the use of the music from the Soviet national anthem (MacKinnon 2007; Kramer 2001). Both the parades and the national anthem were first instituted during Stalin’s rule. The consistent presentation of the Stalinist period as an era of Russian greatness, as opposed to one of terror and repression is part of constructing the collective memory of that period.

Ricoeur (2004) in *Memory, History, Forgetting* notes that memory and forgetting exist in symbiosis. Forgiveness is a key component that structures the way that events—particularly negatives ones such as genocide—are remembered and portrayed in historical narratives. It is what must precede any collective structuring of portrayals of the event in question. This, however, is a path Russia has not yet taken. Ricoeur also brings in Karl Jaspers’ (1947) notion of moral guilt—the extent to which individuals acted as agents of the state in committing atrocities—as a component that helps to determine, or undermine,
the extent to which societies and individuals are willing or able to keep the memories of significant events alive in societies. This is perhaps useful in understanding why Russia has thus far avoided coming to terms with the crimes of the Soviet era, although this study focuses more on the outcome of that process, i.e. the intentional minimizing of unpleasant aspects of Stalinist history. People are naturally hesitant to examine a history that may make them complicit in the crimes of that period (in terms of the Russian case, see Applebaum 2003; more generally, see Rigby 2001; Minow 1998). They are also, then, more likely to accept a version of history that does not emphasize these crimes.

I also build on the literature of Soviet and post-Soviet history and collective memory. Sherlock (2007a), Smith (2002), and Wertsch (2002) all offer analyses of the creation of historical myth, which allows political actors to utilize history in controlling contemporary narratives. While Smith (2002) focuses on the political elite and events (such as the 1996 presidential election) during the Yeltsin period, when intra-elite control of the discourse about the Soviet past was much more contested than it is in Russia today, she notes the importance of the Patriotic War as an event that Russian society could rally around, especially if it is properly mythologized. She points out that this was something the Communist Party realized relatively early on in post-Soviet Russia (Smith 2002). This work is useful for its presentation of the way that political forces harness the past for their own purposes.

Wertsch (2002) also focuses on the political elite and the ways in which it creates collective memory by using “cultural tools—especially narrative texts” at their disposal (172). He applies the concept of “schematic narrative templates” (2002:156)—which are much like the ‘structural’ forms of discourse described by van Dijk (1993)—to the Great
Patriotic War. These templates offer a stable, although non-specific narrative of the war’s history that is then easier for society to consume and for elites to employ than an account with greater historical specificity.

**Memorialization**

Forest and Johnson (2002) focus more specifically on the process of memorialization in the context of post-Soviet national identity. They argue that what is chosen to be memorialized is the result of a process of intra-elite contestation that occurs at critical junctures in history. Thus memorials are in a state of flux according to the vagaries of the political elite that happen to be in power, and according to the degree to which they have the backing of the population—or at least, that they are not experiencing outright revolt (see also Barsalou and Baxter 2007).

In Forest and Johnson’s work, it is particularly interesting to see the transformation of Soviet-era monuments into a specifically Russian context, and the way that unsavory characteristics are omitted during this transformation. For example, when examining the celebration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany during World War II, they note that “[i]n emphasizing the Russian character of Victory Day, the most controversial parts of the Soviet role in WWII (such as Stalin’s pact with Hitler, the forcible incorporation of the Baltic states, the deportations of non-Russian peoples, and the devastation of Ukraine and Belarus) could be swept aside. This left a neater, less ambiguous history with which to work” (2002:532). This is an excellent example of the state re-shaping history to suit the present. Other scholars have been useful to this study
with their analyses of memorials as palimpsests—physical structures whose meaning is transformed as time, circumstances, and narratives change (Huysson 2003; Ladd 1997; also Lehti et al. 2008).

Forest, Johnson and Till (2004) address the theme of de-politicizing Soviet monuments as part of a larger examination of national identity and public memory. They argue that there are many arenas in which differing publics and elites compete in different settings to determine the composition of public memory. Most relevant to this study is their conclusion that elites at all levels of government have “captured” the process of memorialization (2004:375). As the authors demonstrate in their case studies, this “contributes to circumscribing debate over and the recognition of the more controversial aspects of Soviet history” (Forest et al. 2004:375).

I also employ more contemporary conceptualizations of memorials, such as the spontaneous and experiential memorials described by scholars such as Doss (2008). These use materials designed to personalize the experience of visiting these sites. Both spontaneous and experiential models of memorialization have applications in examining memorials to the Patriotic War and to political repression.

Etkind (2004), in his work on cultural memory, notes that the process of memorialization is an interactive one, with ‘hard’ memory (memorials, plaques, statues, parks) acting in concert with the ‘soft’ forms of cultural memory (texts, speeches, books). He notes that the process has been particularly problematic in Russia, where the specifics of what is memorialized exists in tension with how it is to be memorialized and what the memory should be. In the Russian case, there is a great deal of ambiguity about the past,
and the absence of any sort of systematic self-evaluation by Russian society about its past contributes to ongoing difficulties with memorialization.

The Contours of This Study

In this study, I examine the ways that the political elite have manipulated the discourse of victory in the Great Patriotic War during the Stalinist period to facilitate positive portrayals, i.e. discourse, of a strong, Soviet-style state. This interpretation of the Soviet past may facilitate the elites’ claims regarding the benefits of a strong state. It also plays into the nostalgic view that many Russians have of the Soviet system.

I use Etkind’s (2004) conceptualization of memory as consisting of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ components. In Chapter 2, the first component of ‘soft’ memory, I look at the way discourse is formulated by the political elite through the use of official pronouncements, but also via contradictory messages and positive portrayals of the Great Patriotic War and the Terror in the media and popular entertainment. In Chapter 3, the second ‘soft’ component, I examine these discourses as they appear in the Russian educational system. Through interviews with both teachers and students, a tracing of the development of the Stalinist discourse as it has appeared in curricula in post-Soviet

11 For a more detailed description of the semiotics of discourse and the forms it can take, see Kress and van Leeuwen (2001).
12 Although education is a discursive phenomenon, I chose to devote a separate chapter to it, as there are particular characteristics of state manipulation of the curricula in the Russian education system, as well as issues of access (such as the provision of state-approved textbooks free of charge to schools by the government), that I felt would be best treated as distinct from the control of discourse as it occurs through speeches, official texts, the media, and so on. The chapter on civil society, while similarly bearing on discourse, has aspects—such as the control of the apparatus through which discourse is transmitted—that seemed to me to be better analyzed separately, although the distinction is artificial.
Russia, and analysis of current state-approved and state-provided textbooks, I demonstrate that the process of discourse control, while not completely initiated at the top, is controlled by the political elite at present. In Chapter 4, using Etkind’s notion of ‘hard’ memory, I consider the manipulation and co-optation of the processes of memorialization in the cases of both the Terror and the Great Patriotic War, both in terms of the memorials themselves, but also in terms of the access, location, and contextual information offered at these sites (Forest and Johnson 2002; Forest, et al. 2004; Doss 2008; Niven 2007; Mayo 1988). In Chapter 5, I examine ways that the political elite exert more overt control over the civil society sector in Russia, using the specific case of the human rights group Memorial, whose founding mission was to document and preserve the memory of victims of Stalinist repressions. I contrast that with another historically-minded group that also speaks on the Stalinist period, the Nashi (Ours) youth group, with its positive emphasis on victory in the Great Patriotic War. Finally, in Chapter 6, I end with a discussion about the broader implications of the findings of this study.
Dissertation Chapter 2: ‘Soft Memory’ Part I

We forget everything. What we remember is not what actually happened, not history, but merely that hackneyed dotted line they have chosen to drive into our memories by incessant hammering (Solzhenitsyn 1973:299).

Introduction

In the current discourse of the Stalinist period, both the character and the extent of human rights abuses are being manipulated to better reflect the political elite’s vision of a great Russian state with a past of which to be proud, not for which to repent. They have co-opted the achievements of the Stalin era and re-framed them as Russian achievements, creating a useable history with which to legitimize and perpetuate an authoritarian style of leadership, centralize power, and preserve that power. And while the majority of facts about Stalin’s Terror are now available for all to see, even in Russia, the political elite actively work to minimize, downplay, and justify the abuses, keeping them “hidden while in plain view” (Adler 2005:1094).

In this chapter, I analyze several examples of the elite’s public statements or actions that signaled to Russian society that more positive interpretations of Soviet history are appropriate—and that negative ones are not. This includes the recent rehabilitation of Stalin’s image in Russian society, and I note the ways in which the political elite have made Stalin a positive symbol of the Soviet period in general. Primary among these is the current dominance of the Great Patriotic War myth, which has
elevated the status of the Soviet victory in the Second World War—and Stalin’s role as
leader during that conflict—while minimizing the human rights abuses of the Stalinist
Terror (Gudkov 2005; Kucherenko 2011; Roginsky 2008). I also briefly examine the
contradictory narratives that have served to obfuscate the violence of Stalinism, and that
allow for more conservative portrayals of that time. I explain the roots of the current
nostalgia for the Soviet period, which grew primarily out of the turbulence and chaos of
the Yeltsin period, but which also arose out of a lack of a post-Soviet Russian national
identity. Within this, I note the ways in which this nostalgia is encouraged and fostered
by the political elite in Russia today, and the ways that it is used to manipulate the
collective memory of the Soviet period. Finally, because the role of the political elite is
significant to both the composition and the dissemination of discourse in society, I briefly
analyze the political elite as it has come to exist since Vladimir Putin came to power.
The first element of this analysis focuses on personal histories and characteristics of elites
in order to gain insight into their motivations and beliefs. The second focuses on the
primary means by which the elite is able to control discourse to the extent that they do.
This requires an examination of the political elite’s co-optation of the media in Russia.

**The Role of Stalin in the Historical Discourse of the Soviet Period**

The political elite and Russian society generally have been loath to criticize
abuses of the Soviet era outright, and the Stalinist period in particular is subject to
ambivalent and often contradictory official narratives (Roginsky 2008; Shlapentokh and
Bondartsova 2009). What has historically been emphasized about Stalin’s leadership vacillates between his particularly pernicious brand of repression and the perception of him as heroically bringing the Soviet Union victory in the Great Patriotic War (Adler 2005; Roginsky 2008). In attempting to separate the image of Stalin as the repressive tyrant from his image of the Great Leader (vozhd), one of these images is emphasized while the other is minimized. Stalin’s reputation has swung between these two poles, and when his role as Great Leader is in ascendancy, as it is in Russia today, the memory of the repressions is minimized or excluded from the historical discourse. Gudkov notes that “[t]he higher the status of the events of the ‘war’ in their teleological organization as a chain of events leading up to pre-determined Victory, the more the memory of Stalin’s repressions is receding … their perceived significance for Russian history has fallen from 29 percent to 1 per cent over the past twelve years [1993-2005], according to our surveys, while positive views of Stalin have increased from 19 percent to 53 percent between 1998 and 2003” (2005:7).

When the discourse focuses on Stalin’s role as murderous tyrant, as it did in the late Soviet period, the myth of the Great Patriotic War is damaged. It has been impossible for the war narrative to be glorified as a demonstration of what a strong state can achieve without Stalin, because his role as Great Leader is intimately tied to the Soviet victory in it (Roginsky 2008). When the symbolism of the victory in the war is amplified, so, too, is the “authority of comrade Stalin” (Gudkov 2005:7).

Victory in the war is the most remembered achievement of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet period, it was constantly invoked, memorialized, and glorified (Gudkov 2005; Kucherenko 2011; Morozov 2008; Stites 2000; Tumarkin 1994). In
contemporary history textbooks, it is referred to as the “Great Victory” (*Velikaya Pobeda*) and the term ‘victory’ is capitalized to indicate its importance (Danilov et al. 2009:3). Although the narrative of the war went through a relatively brief period where it was quite anti-Stalinist (Roginsky 2008), Stalin’s role as Great Leader was brought back into the narrative with the rehabilitation of Stalin that occurred in the Brezhnev years and lasted into the early Gorbachev period. It was only during glasnost in the mid-1980s that the war narrative, and Stalin, again came under attack. Because of this criticism, the war narrative throughout the 1990s had difficulty maintaining the sanctity that it had enjoyed during the Soviet years. When Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999, however, he began a series of measures designed to co-opt the war narrative as a glorious Russian, as opposed to Soviet, achievement, and he used Stalin as the figurehead of the victory. Several events heralded this new portrayal of the Stalinist period.

Early on, the political elite dropped the ideological component of Stalin’s personality cult and, using the war as a backdrop, began a “rehabilitation” of Stalin that included the introduction of a coin bearing his likeness and, more significantly, the revival of the Soviet national anthem (albeit with mostly different lyrics) of 1943 for use as the national anthem of the Russian Federation. This rehabilitation has continued into the Medvedev years, with the restoration of a fragment of a quote from Stalin at the Kurskaya metro station in Moscow in 2009, and plans were scrapped only at the last minute for pro-Stalin advocates to have posters of Stalin displayed prominently throughout Moscow as part of the 2010 Victory Day celebrations.

Another event that signaled a more positive portrayal of Stalin was Putin awarding the Order of Merit to former Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Dmitry Yazov
(Sherlock 2007a). Yazov was one of the members of the emergency commission that had attempted a coup against Gorbachev in 1991. He is also a strident defender of Stalin’s image. Shortly after receiving this award, Yazov published a lengthy article in the newspaper *Izvestia*, in which he claimed that the collapse of the Soviet Union was caused by the harm done to Stalin’s reputation during the glasnost era (Sherlock 2007a). Further, referencing the victory in the Great Patriotic War, he called Stalin “the greatest military leader of all ages and peoples” (quoted in Sherlock 2007:164). In calling for a reassessment of Stalin in light of the damaging revelations of the Terror, Yazov suggested that “even geniuses make mistakes” (quoted in Sherlock 2007a:164).

In the new portrayal of the war by the political elite, the Terror has been fused to the war narrative as a preemptive measure that was necessary for the Soviet Union to industrialize rapidly. In this way, the ubiquity and sacralization of the war narrative have allowed it to incorporate and diminish one of the other traumatic events of the Stalin era—the murder and incarceration of millions of innocent people during the Terror. As one Russian scholar puts it, “Victory in the war retrospectively legitimizes the Soviet totalitarian system as a whole and uncontrolled rule as such; justifies the accelerated military-industrial modernization—the repressions, famines, poverty, and enormous numbers of deaths after collectivization—and creates a version of the past that has no alternative and provides the only possible and significant framework for interpreting history” (Gudkov 2005:7). Because of the primacy of the narrative of the war and victory in it, the horrors of the Nazi invasion and occupation are foremost in the collective memory of the past, rather than the horrors of the earlier Stalinist period (Lynch 2005).
But above all, it is the victory in the war that is elevated (Gudkov 2005; Kucherenko 2011; see also Fofanova and Morozov 2009).

Virtually every person to whom I spoke attributed Stalin’s current popularity to the Great Patriotic War. Comments such as “Only such a great man could have led us to victory against the fascists,” or “Stalin is popular because he brought us through the war,” were typical, especially among older Russians. The phenomenon of pre-war industrialization was often put forth as a defensive reaction to questions I asked about Stalin during informal interviews. For example, when I asked why Stalin was so popular in Russia today, one elderly woman furrowed her brow at me as if I were an idiot for even posing the question: “You know, industrializing a country is hard to do. And there was the war. Stalin miraculously brought us through that (sukhoi iz vody)...”

But younger Russians, too, were captivated by the war narrative as indicative of Stalin’s greatness. Talking with a group of university students at a coffee house in the Siberian city of Tomsk, they were all aware of the political repression under Stalin. Yet when I suggested that some Russians felt that Stalin had imprisoned and killed a lot of innocent people, one young man commented, “But he needed to build industry, modernize the country. How else can you do it? If the Soviet Union hadn’t been industrialized, we never would have won the war.” Surveys conducted recently show that this sort of thinking is not unique; a large number of younger Russians are ambivalent about Stalin—especially because he is perceived as bringing victory to the Soviet Union—with fifty-six percent of survey respondents aged 16-29 saying that Stalin did more good than harm to the Soviet Union, and nineteen percent of respondents saying
that they would vote for him if he were running for president today (Mendelson and Gerber 2006).13

**The Content and Significance of the Great Patriotic War Narrative**

It is not hard to see why victory in the Great Patriotic War is used by the political elite as the foundational event for Russian national identity. Victory over the Nazis validated the tremendous sacrifice and suffering that was required for that achievement. The war was horrific for the Soviet people. Losses were staggering, eclipsing the numbers of war dead among all the rest of the allied powers. Estimates vary, but range from twenty to twenty-seven million dead, almost half of which were civilians (Riazanovksy 1993; Davies 1997).14 The Soviet population was also victimized by Hitler’s *Einsatzgruppen*, the special-purpose units that operated in occupied areas, executing Communists, Jews and other Nazi-designated undesirables en masse—sometimes as many as 40,000 in a single day—and then burying them in mass graves (Hilberg 2003). Perhaps most famously, in September of 1941 almost a hundred thousand Jews and ten thousand non-Jews were executed at Babi Yar outside Kiev in Ukraine (Tumarkin 1994). This was prior to the bureaucratized mass killing that occurred later at death camps such as Treblinka and Auschwitz, which had not yet become operational.

Western historians have noted that some of the German advance’s initial success was due to an unwillingness to fight among a sizeable portion of the Soviet populace,

---

13 Gudkov (2005), who conducted similar surveys, had a slightly higher figure for respondents who said they would vote for Stalin if he were alive and running for president at 26-27 percent.
14 By comparison, the United States, which fought the war on two fronts, the European and Pacific, lost fewer then 500,000 soldiers and civilians.
who instead welcomed the Nazi invaders as liberators (Merridale 2006; Riazanovsky 1993; Tumarkin 1994). While this may have indeed been the case, the atrocious treatment of the civilian population by the Nazis soon disabused the Soviet people of any ideas about things being better under German rule. The fact of large numbers of willing collaborators, however, is not discussed in the discourse of the war today.\(^\text{15}\) It is disruptive to the sanctity of the narrative to append to it the idea that there was enough disenchantment with the communist regime to actively collaborate with the invaders. And so this fact is not mentioned, or it is downplayed by the political elite and by Russian society. Also downplayed—or ignored outright—is the fact that 150,000 Soviet soldiers were executed by either the NKVD or the Red Army during the war, and that a million Soviet prisoners-of-war were transferred from Nazi camps to Soviet ones after the war’s end (Lynch 2005).

In Russian society today, the war narrative discourages any critical analysis of the war or the period immediately preceding it, and stigmatizes attempts to look closely at anything that may be perceived as tarnishing the portrayal of its conduct (Fofanova and Morozov 2009; Gudkov 2005). Events such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact signed with Nazi Germany in 1939, the Katyn massacre of Polish army officers in 1940, and the Stalinist Terror, which decimated the Soviet officer corps in advance of the Nazi invasion, are “squeezed out of the public space and left for professional historians to discuss” (Fofanova and Morozov 2009:27).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Soviet and then Russian authorities publicly admitted the facts of the above events, the memory of the war solely as a great victory was damaged (Kirschenbaum 2006; Shlapentokh 1992). The war had been highly

\(^{15}\) An exception to this is the brief discussion of collaboration in Russian school textbooks. See Chapter 3.
significant in Soviet-era collective memory, but during the Soviet era the war served as a mythical time during which the people and the party, i.e. the people and the state, were united in a common purpose (Smith 1976). With the elimination of the Soviet state, and revelations about the state’s, and especially Stalin’s, role in, for example, not being prepared for the Nazi invasion, the war had difficulty standing on its own as a monumental achievement. The war narrative simply could not exist without Stalin. Even with the damaging revelations in the Soviet press, especially in the years 1988-1990 (Davies 1997), the Stalinist war narrative was so deeply entrenched in Soviet society that it was and still is difficult for many older Russians to imagine the victory without him.

The damage to the sanctity of the Patriotic War narrative that occurred during the glasnost era was substantial. It took the passage of time, and the creation of a new war narrative—one that glossed over glasnost-era criticisms of Soviet conduct—to return the gleam to the collective memory of the war. This was especially true of Stalin’s role in the war.

One of the reasons that it is difficult to completely divorce Stalin’s crimes from his achievements is because the narrative now portrays one as flowing from the other. Stalin’s repressions, which swelled the ranks of the GULAG camps all over the Soviet Union, were viewed by people I talked to as providing the ‘raw material’ for the rapid industrialization of Soviet society, without which the Soviet Union could never have won the war. It is probably true that the Soviet Union benefited from the toil of millions of forced laborers. It is also likely that the Soviet Union would not have emerged from the war victorious and as a military and industrial super power without the initial

---

16 This was one of the main glasnost-era criticisms of the war’s conduct by Stalin that was given extensive coverage in the Soviet press.

17 As discussed in Chapter 1, however, this was not the main purpose of the Stalinist Terror.
industrialization that occurred under Stalin (Gregory and Markevich 2002). Because of this, the political elite do not deny the existence of the Stalinist Terror, they simply minimize it as a necessary evil (Gudkov 2005).

The Contemporary Discourse of Stalin’s Terror

One of the impediments to an accounting, or even an accurate description, of the Stalinist Terror is the fact that there is no central repository of information about that period in Soviet history. This keeps it subject to ambivalence, and complicates attempts to forge alternative narratives in the discourse. Human rights organizations have been successful in compiling “books of memory,” that list victim tallies and information about repressed individuals. But these detail the experience of the Stalinist repressions at the regional and sometimes local level, and these books are not available for purchase. They are all privately published and often have very limited print runs. The few books that are for sale to the public have the same shortcoming—they address the particular circumstances of the Terror at the local level. For example, at the Perm-36 strict regime camp, one may purchase books on the Terror as it occurred in Perm (Suslov 2000); on the Solovetsky Islands, one may buy books about the Stalinist period as it relates to the experience on the islands (Volkov 2008); and even at the State Museum of the GULAG in Moscow, one may purchase books on the Terror as it occurred in Moscow (Golovkova 2009; Demidov 2008). This localization presents the phenomenon of the Terror in a
“fragmented way” (Roginsky 2008), as opposed to presenting the totality of the phenomenon to the Russian public.

The absence of a central archive relating to political repression during the Soviet, and especially Stalinist periods of Russian history may not seem problematic, but it is important to remember that in a closed society such as the Soviet Union, the state was the only body that kept official records on the fates of repressed individuals. This is not the case in open societies where there exist myriad avenues for investigating the fates of people killed or imprisoned by the state. It may also be argued that winnowing access to official records of political repression is merely an example of a state not being willing to investigate (and publicize) its own human rights abuses. The Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, however, are not the same state. I argue that the refusal of the Russian state to make available the official records about Soviet era human rights abuses is indicative of the extent to which Putin and the political elite around him strive to project continuity with the Soviet past, and to portray that past in favorable terms—it is therefore anathema to the elite to have potentially damaging information readily accessible to the public.

The failure to create any such central repository of information about the Terror has left the information that is available compartmentalized into individual archives that do not allow for a consideration of a complete picture of the Terror. And while it is true that the Russian people are aware of crimes of the Stalinist era, how much they know about the period is a subject for debate. As both Getty (1999) and Khlevniuk (2004) note, the archival material that has been made available to scholars, while substantial, is certainly incomplete. The main documents that were made available to scholars—through
the efforts of Yale University Press—are from the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Recent History (RTsKhIDNI), the Central Repository of Recent Documentation (TsKhSD), and the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) (Brent 2008), are now being increasingly restricted. Substantial archival holdings were lost due to the evacuation of the central archive during the war, and many documents were to be stored only for a limited amount of time. Khlevniuk (2004) laments the fact that these rules were actually followed. Khlevniuk also points out that “[t]here are indications that the elimination of documents was often not a mere formality but a political act” (2004:6). The destruction of correspondence for the year 1937 of the Soviet Procurator Vyshinsky, is an example of such practices (Khlevniuk 2004).

The nature of the materials that are still classified is telling. The most obvious case of restricting access to documents is that of the security services archives, which have never been fully opened. These records would ostensibly contain the names of informants, collaborators, and other principals in the Terror. They would also provide the names of individual victims, and more importantly, where bodies are buried. Mass graves have been discovered in Russia as late as 2007, with little assistance from the Russian government in identifying victims or helping with their exhumation and reburial (Etkind 2009; Mackinnon 2007). Even Russian government sources acknowledge that only about a third of all mass grave sites in Russia containing the bodies of those who perished during the Stalin era have been found (Adler 2005).

Furthermore, Khlevniuk (2004) reminds us that it is not possible to get an adequate picture of the true nature of the camps and the phenomenon of the Terror from

---

18 Vyshinsky was the procurator for the Soviet Union for the most substantial period of political repression under Stalin, from 1935 to 1939. The post of procurator is the highest office in law enforcement, similar to that of the Attorney General in the United States.
archival data alone. Information that would be helpful in personalizing the Terror, such as complaints to camp administrators and other non-bureaucratic materials, were some of the documents that were stored for the shortest periods of time in archives.

While the lack of cultural artifacts and information about the GULAG may not seem important, but it contributes to the general lack of accurate and accessible information about Stalinist political repression in Russian society. Scholarly studies looking at political repression (e.g. Brodsky 2002; Khlevniuk 2009; 2004; Getty and Naumov 2002) tend to remain the province of historians and other scholars and do not have a wide readership outside of academia in Russia. As a human rights worker explained to me, “Those sorts of books are mostly read by professors.”

This is not the case with other examples of egregious human rights abuses. For example, in the West the Holocaust has seen the development of an entire academic field (Etkind 2004), that includes cultural and sociological studies, and which has a substantial readership outside of academia.

Finally, even the limited access to the archives that scholars once enjoyed has been curtailed. Several members of human rights organizations in Russia mentioned that the archives that had previously been opened are now closed again, and the phenomenon has been documented in the Western press. This is perhaps not surprising given the proclivity of the security services to guard secrets, but it prevents a realistic assessment of the true scope of the Stalinist Terror, and inhibits the development of alternative narratives about political repression under Stalin. These tasks were difficult enough even when the limited archival materials were accessible.
By contrast, in 2009 Russian President Medvedev convened the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests to comb archives in order to come up with an ‘official’ and accurate tally of the number Soviet citizens and soldiers killed during the Great Patriotic War. This reflects not only the importance of the war to the political elite, but its relevance as a potent political symbol. There has been no such effort by the Russian government to accurately determine the number of deaths caused by Stalin’s repressions, and this has again been left to historians to sort out (see, for example, Ellman 2002; Davies 1997; Conquest 1990).

The discourse about political repression in Russia is also often contradictory in that when public pronouncements on the subject are made, they are rarely matched by actions. An example of this is President Medvedev’s assertion that the memory of victims of repression should be as important as the memory of victory in the Great Patriotic War—a remark made while a court case brought by regional prosecutors in Arkangelsk was proceeding against a historian who had published a book about victims of Stalinist repression in the region, with no action taken by federal authorities to stop it. Shlapentokh and Bondartsova (2009) explain the schizophrenic nature of official pronouncements as symptomatic of a “contradictory” official ideology in Russia today, especially with respect to Stalin (303). They refer to two disparate components of this ideology, the imperial and the liberal, which are at odds with each other and yet are embraced by political elites at different times for different purposes. As Shlapentokh and Bodartsova explain

The imperial part of official ideology is inspired by the nostalgia for the Soviet empire. It demands a belief in Russian greatness and the future restoration of the
country’s previous geopolitical role. Quite often this yearning for the restoration of the empire is formatted into a call for a special historical road for Russia, which can be reduced to an obsession with greatness (2009:303).

The idea of a special Russian greatness has a significant following in Russia, and is espoused by politician-academics such as former Duma member Natalya Narochnitskaya (2008; 2009). It has also made an occasional appearance in Western journals (see Shlapentokh 1992, for example).

The liberal component of the official ideology, by contrast, views the end of the Soviet Union in a positive light, and embraces some of the freedoms commonly associated with liberal democracies elsewhere in the world, notably those concerned with market economics and private ownership of property and enterprises. Shlapentokh and Bodartsova (2009) argue that these components are in constant conflict with one another, although the imperial component has been in ascendancy since Putin came to power in Russia.

Scholars such as Sherlock (2007a; 2007b), however, have noted that even the more liberal segments of Russian society have come to see the value in narratives that are unifying for the Russian people. Victory in the Patriotic War serves this purpose, and so there has been lessening objection among liberals to its use as a symbol around which Russians can rally. The war narrative has been mythologized as a heroic event that unites Russians, providing them with a sense of patriotism, national pride, and identity (Foranova and Morozov 2009; Gudkov 2005; Kucherenko 2011; Morozov 2008).

Outright denial of the human rights abuses of the Stalin years occurs in a rather blunt fashion. While scholarly accounts of the Terror are rarely in stores, pseudo-intellectual projects, (for example, Dmitry Liskov’s *Stalinist Repressions: The Great Lie*
of the Twentieth Century) appear in surprising numbers at bookstores in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Books denying the Stalinist Terror rely on creative interpretations of history and historical documents to demonstrate either that the arrests made during the years of the Terror were justified, that the number of those arrested is inflated, or that Khrushchev or other agents within the Soviet hierarchy were responsible for the Terror. Such publications are symptomatic of a willful blindness to Soviet human rights abuses that exists in a substantial element of Russian society (Kramer 2001; Yakovlev 2002). They are contradicted by most of the serious scholarly work on the subject, which finds that Stalin had a very direct role in the planning and execution of the Terror (Klevniuk 2009).

The appending of Stalin-era human rights abuses to the narrative of victory in the Great Patriotic War depended in part on the fractured and often incoherent narrative of political repression under Stalin. The abuses are attached to the war narrative because as the weaker of the two narratives, they can be. A population nostalgic for the Soviet era is a key factor in the political elites’ ability to glorify the war at the expense of the repressions. But the relative weakness of the discourse about political repression in Russia today is also caused in part by the plurality of ideological viewpoints about both the character and the role of political repression during the Soviet era.\textsuperscript{19}

The differing viewpoints on the meaning of the Stalinist repressions is in contrast to the narrative of the Great Patriotic War which has been manipulated by the political elite to be uncomplicated and heroic (Gudkov 2005). As Merridale (2003) puts it, “It is

\textsuperscript{19} Two examples given in a state-sanctioned Russian history textbook to demonstrate these differing viewpoints are (1) that the Stalinist repressions were justified because there was indeed a ‘fifth column’ of internal enemies in the Soviet Union, and (2) that the repressions were bad because they weakened the Soviet state in advance of the Nazi invasion in 1941 (see Danilov at al. 2012:257).
Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Russia: Longing for the Good Old Days

Much has been written on the phenomenon of nostalgia for the Soviet era in Russia today (Lee 2011; Oushakine 2007; Boym 2001; Mendelson and Gerber 1996; Munro 2006). It is important to note that nostalgic portrayals of victory in the Great Patriotic War do not exist *sui generis*. They are a part, albeit a significant one, of the larger role of Soviet symbols and myths in popular culture in post-Soviet Russia (Lee 2011; Liñán 2010; Sherlock 2007; Boym 2001). Is it easy enough to see manifestations of this phenomenon in the streets of Russia today: In St. Petersburg, for example, the city’s hockey team, SKA, has as its logo the Soviet crest with hammer and sickle; the newspapers that the city authorities put up on bulletin boards for passengers at public transportation stops to read are *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, and so on.

Since roughly the middle of the 1990s, there has been a growing nostalgia for the Soviet era, brought about by increasing societal dissatisfaction with political and social reforms, a sense of insecurity, and frustration at the loss of prestige that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. What has changed is that this nostalgia has been co-opted as part of a political agenda to portray the Soviet past favorably. As Lee (2011) observes, “If
the nostalgia of the mid-1990s started from the ‘inside,’ i.e., as a genuinely popular impulse—after the end of the 1990s, it acquired its dynamic force from the ‘outside’ It is noteworthy that this ‘outside’ is neither a mature civil society nor the intelligentsia …but political power itself” (172, 173). In such an atmosphere, positive portrayals of Stalin become less striking. They are but another aspect of the Soviet experience.

There is nothing inherently wrong with viewing the past fondly, and it is certainly a very human behavior to do so. It is also a common human behavior to focus solely on the pleasant aspects of the imagined past while allowing the more disturbing or unpleasant aspects to fall outside the window of remembrance. That is, viewing the past through ‘rose-colored glasses,’ or believing in the myth of an era, not the reality. As Halbwachs observed, “Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess” (1992 [1952]:51). Americans, for example—even ones who did not actually live through the period—tend to view the 1950s as an era of security, stability and prosperity. They do not associate the period with the racism and sexism of the era, nor do they call to mind unpleasant events of the time, such as the Korean War or McCarthyism and the “Red Scare” that ruined the lives of many innocent people.

The immediate period following the collapse of the Soviet Union was traumatic for many Russians for a variety of reasons. Primary among these was the crisis of identity that many Russians experienced after the Soviet collapse (Smith 2002; Yurchak 2001). For many Russians their private lives, goals and ambitions were bound up in the Soviet
state, and for some, the Communist Party (Easter 2008; Adler 2005). In the period of less than a decade, the Soviet Union went from being one of the world’s two superpowers, the key competitor to the United States in space exploration and military might, to being a country in near-constant economic and political crisis. The expansion of NATO during this time was viewed by many Russians as a humiliating blow delivered at a time when Russia was least able to do anything about it (Fofanova and Morozov 2009).

There was also economic uncertainty, as the new Russian economy experienced several bouts of severe inflation after Finance Minister and acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar freed price controls in 1992. Many Russians lost their life savings during this time. My professors at the State Technical University of St. Petersburg, for example, had not been paid for months at the time I studied there in 1993. And there were many apocryphal stories of people using what was left of their life savings to buy a pair of tennis shoes or a kilogram of tomatoes. By this time, a popular joke asked: “What has Yeltsin done in three years that the Communists couldn’t do in seventy?—Make communism look good.” People were already fondly remembering the stability of the Soviet period, and as the freshness of the revelations about the Terror faded, many were longing for a return to that period.

There was an attempt early in the post-Soviet era to hold the Communist Party criminally responsible for the crimes of the Soviet regime. But that effort came to an early end as “[a]ttempts to clearly differentiate ‘victims’ and ‘villains’ of the Soviet regime were increasingly replaced by conscious efforts to restore the lost feeling of collective belonging and to reestablish cultural connections with the past that would be neither horrifying nor humiliating” (Oushankine 2007:452). Yeltsin and his political elite,
for example, sought to reconnect with pre-Soviet historical symbols (Smith 2002); of the
greatness of Imperial Russia, although these proved too distant from the present to be
accepted by most Russians. Instead, as Roginsky notes, “Gradually and insidiously, the
concept of Great Russia came to mean the Soviet period as well, particularly the Stalinist
period” (2008:3). Stalin is the logical choice to symbolize the Soviet period because “No
one political leader in the past symbolizes that success of the Soviet empire more than
Stalin” (Shlapentokh and Bondartsvoa 2009:304). The political elite addressed the
Stalinist legacy by focusing on positive aspects of Stalin’s rule while excluding or
minimizing negative ones. As my advisor in Russia put it, “The Stalin they [the political
elite] are rehabilitating is the Stalin of victory in the war, not the Stalin of the
repressions.”

Much of the nostalgia I encountered was for the later, i.e. post-Khrushchev
period,20 which I argue is roughly analogous to the American image of the 1950s. While
the Brezhnev period, for example, is often portrayed as an era of stagnation and shortage
by Western scholars (e.g. Tucker 1987; Malia 1995), the period is remembered by many
Russians as a time when one knew what to expect in daily life. As Shlapentokh notes:
“The regime was able to provide basic consumer goods to the majority of the Soviet
population, particularly in the big cities and capitals. At the same time, Brezhnev’s
regime stressed the stability of the cadres and provided the Soviet citizens with an
unprecedented feeling of security” (1992:203-204).

Several major technological and military achievements during the Brezhnev
period also served to bolster the Russian memory of the time. First, the Soviet Union had

20 Lee (2011) also notes that this is the “most appealing period” for the current Soviet nostalgia, noting that
“it has become an object of nostalgic longing, symbolizing stability, order, and a robust system of social
welfare” (158, 159).
notched several monumental achievements in its space race with the United States during this period, including, during the Khrushchev period, being the first country to put a man, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, into orbit around the earth. The resulting international acclaim strengthened the image of the USSR both domestically and abroad. The Soviet space program continued to excel throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Second, the Soviet Union had been successfully engaged the United States in an arms race and had remained at rough parity with it, at least until the beginning of the Reagan era. This was also a source of pride for Soviet citizens at the time.

The political elite crafted a historical narrative that accentuated the positive aspects of the Soviet regime while downplaying negatives. But they have used Stalin as a symbol of the entire Soviet period in doing this. His image unifies the various periods that came after him because he is portrayed as laying the foundation for the future achievements of successive Soviet leaders. For many Russians, the Brezhnev era may be the idealized memory of the Soviet past (Lee 2011), but the symbol of that past is Stalin and his achievements.

With respect to the Stalinist Terror, there is deep ambivalence about the proper historical role that these abuses played. Roginsky attributes this to an inability to assign the roles of “good and evil” in assessing the terror (2008). Indeed, one of the more peculiar characteristics of the Stalinist repression is the fact that it tended to swallow up those responsible for it along the way. As Roginsky puts it

secretaries of regional committees in August of 1937 all wrote death sentences by the bundle, but by November 1938 half of them had already been shot themselves. In national, and particularly regional memory, the ‘executioners’ – for example the regional committee secretaries of 1937 – are not unambiguously evil: yes, they signed execution warrants, but they also organized the construction of kindergartens and hospitals, and went to workers’ cafeterias personally to test the
food, while their subsequent fate is worthy of sympathy … In remembering the
terror, we are incapable of assigning the main roles, incapable of putting the ‘we’
and ‘they’ in their places. This inability to assign evil is the main thing that
prevents us from being able to embrace the memory of the terror properly. This
makes it far more traumatic. It is one of the main reasons why we push it to the
edge of our historical memory.

Another reason for the ambivalence about the Stalinist repressions is that the
repressions conflict with the positive memories that many Russian hold for the Soviet era.
The repressive and murderous aspects of the Stalin years are an irritant to the otherwise
comforting nostalgia for what many perceive as an era of Russian greatness, prosperity
and stability (Morozov 2008).

The Political Elite and the Re-Casting of Discourse about the Soviet Period

While there are both top-down and bottom-up explanations for why the discourse
of the Stalinist period looks the way it does in Russia today, the former is dominant in
Russia today. Since the early 2000s, the political elite have exploited the tendency to
Soviet nostalgia for political purposes, using it to portray the Soviet period as an era in
which law and order prevailed, and grand achievements (especially the victory in the
Patriotic War) were possible. Some of this has to do with the fact that many members of
the political elite had their own formational experiences within the Soviet system and
have their own nostalgic visions of that period. Let us now turn to the composition of the
political elite.

Kryshtanovskaya and White define the political elite in Russia in “positional
terms,” to constitute “members of the Security Council, senior officials within the
presidential administration, members of the government and both houses of parliament, heads of regional executives, presidential envoys, federal inspectors and the business elite” (2005:1066). Within this elite there are several different groups, some of which meet more formally, such as Putin’s meetings with the Security Council. Other groups meet informally, and consist of Putin’s closest allies, who might be better described as his friends (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005). While members of different groups may attend different meetings at different times, they tend to belong to one of two ‘clans’ as Kryshtanovskaya and White describe them: the siloviki and the “liberals” (2005:1069).21 There is substantial differentiation among these groups as well, but this occurs mostly along the lines of economic policy preferences. All of the political elite subscribe to “the continued consolidation of political and economic power within a highly centralized state, buttressed by large, well-financed security and defense structures” (Bremmer and Charap 2007:89. See also Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005). The primary activities of the political elite are preservation of the status quo, the maintenance of order and stability, and a program of economic nationalism (Bremmer and Charap 2007). The clans within the elite differ on such issues as, for example, the extent to which the re-nationalization of state assets should occur (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003; 2005). But in the main, as Bremmer and Charap note, in the perception of these elites, “law and order and stability are much higher priorities than democratic processes or an active civil society” (2007: 89).

21 Among the siloviki, there are two main groups, one is more concerned with international security, and is led by defense minister Sergei Ivanov. The other focuses more on domestic issues, and is led by Igor Sechin. The liberals “can be described as ‘liberal’ in only the most qualified terms, as it includes people with very authoritarian views about Russia and its future. The leader of this group is Dmitrii Medvedev” (see Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005: 1071).
Former security service personnel would be aware of the need to put forth a public discourse that justified the limiting of political and social freedoms that has come with the centralization of power in Russia. During the Soviet period, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security), or KGB, was adept at this sort of discursive manipulation, and had a lengthy history of historical falsification, propaganda, and disinformation both domestically and internationally (see, for example, Andrew and Mitrokhin 1999; Knight 1996; Albats 1994). Putin was a former KGB operative in the former German Democratic Republic, and the man currently viewed to be his number two, first deputy prime minister Igor Sechin, worked for the Glavnoye Razvedivatelnoye Upravleniye (Soviet military intelligence), or GRU, as a language specialist in Mozambique and Angola during the Cold War before meeting Putin while both worked in St. Petersburg government (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003; 2005; Bremmer and Charap 2007).

The heavy security service presence in the composition of the political elite is also reflected in some of its initial organizational changes, especially the consolidation of the security services and the rehabilitation of their reputation (Schneider 2008). These services, which had been partially dismantled under Yeltsin, were re-organized under the aegis of the domestic Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service), or FSB. Putin re-instituted a system of rewards for media that put forth positive portrayals of the security services (Mereu 2008). He also invited former Soviet KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, who, along with the aforementioned Yazov, was one of the leaders of the abortive coup against Gorbachev in 1991, to several events at the FSB headquarters at the Lubyanka. On the official FSB website, the organization lists itself as
a direct descendent of the Cheka, NKVD, KGB, and all the other services whose acronyms inspired fear at one time or another in Soviet history. Whereas in the former Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe, members of the security service were denounced, jailed, or subjected to lustration, and their organizations reconfigured with a democratic orientation, the security services in the Russian Federation were subjected to none of these practices (Berman and Waller 2006; Ellis 1996), and, since the time of Putin, instead portray their past in positive patriotic terms (Waller 2006).

As has been widely noted by scholars, Putin also centralized political power in the executive—what is referred to as the ‘power vertical’ in Russian (Easter 2008; Lynch 2005; Hashim 2005). He did this by creating seven federal districts, (instead of the previous 89 autonomous regions in the Russian Federation), each of which had a presidential envoy appointed to it. Further, the process for electing regional governors now consists of the Kremlin putting forth candidates who must then be assented to by the regional parliament, as opposed to the previous system where gubernatorial candidates were independently elected in the regions (Zaznaev 2008; Lynch 2005). Finally, the creation of the United Russia party, whose influence in the Russian Duma, or parliament, is so great that it has been called a “hegemonic party” (Smyth et al. 2007), has meant that “the Kremlin sends down commands and the task of Russia’s major party is simply to fulfill them” (Zaznaev 2008:38). This restructuring of government has brought the entirety of the Russian Federation under almost direct control from the center, allowing the Kremlin to monitor and control the composition of discourse as well as avenues of its proliferation.
The primary motives of Putin and the political elite appear to be economic, focused on modernizing Russia, although instilling a sense of patriotism was also part of that agenda. When Putin came to power in 1999, Russia was in dire need of a change in direction. Putin believed that positive portrayals of the past would revitalize society and “generate an essential store of symbolic capital for the task of re-building the Russian state and modernizing the economy” (Sherlock 2007a). He made it clear early on that he viewed the positive interpretation of the Soviet past as the preferred narrative that was to be employed in this task. This was in stark contrast to the preceding narrative. Members of Yeltsin’s coterie “were often repelled by strident patriotism and the celebration of the Russian state,” whereas the political elite under Putin very much glorified the strong state and did so with very transparent signals that “[Putin] favored a narrative [of the USSR]—and a Russian political identity—that privileges its values and interests” (Sherlock 2007a:163).

The Political Elite and the Media

Van Dijk has noted the importance of what he calls “privileged or preferential access” to different modes of discourse if one is to manipulate discourse (van Dijk 1993:259; see also 2006a; 2008). This access is usually enjoyed by political and other elites, giving them symbolic power in society, and allowing them to advance discourses that align with the elites’ interests while minimizing aspects of discourse that do not (van Dijk 2006a). These discourses are crucial to forming the longer-term memory models of
events that incorporate not only personal memories and associations of events, but shared societal representations of those events (van Dijk 2006a). Elites are able to provide interpretive models that provide context to historical events by emphasizing certain aspects of those events over others in the discourse to which they have access (van Dijk 2006a; 2008). This is the essence of ideological reproduction (van Dijk 2006b).

Beginning in 2001, the state acquired—often through hostile takeovers or outright coercion—media outlets through which to broadcast a positive discourse on the Soviet period. As noted earlier, this included several television and radio stations, as well as several newspapers and even a polling organization (Sherlock 2007; Gehlbach 2010). Oates (2007) in her work on how the Russian media have increasingly become more like their Soviet predecessors, notes that in the early post-Soviet period state-owned television channel managers were fired for airing material objectionable to the Kremlin. Now, with the state controlling a much greater portion of media outlets, such measures are not required because “[e]mployees of all media outlets are well aware of the limits of what can be said on air or in print. This parallels the Soviet experience of journalists, in which the action of a censor was rarely needed, as Soviet journalists understood the party ‘line’ and the way all stories should be formulated by the time they received their first jobs” (Oates 2007:1286; see also Gehlbach 2010).

The different ways that the Stalinist Terror and the Great Patriotic War are covered in the news and other popular media such as television programs and movies is instructive as to how the media are used to advance a discourse that favors the latter over the former. The sheer volume of programming dedicated to the war is astounding, and would surely be noticeable to anyone visiting Russia for enough time to watch television
for even a day or so (see Kucherenko 2011). Norris (2007) points out that “in 2004 and 2005 alone Russian television broadcast eight television serials set during the war” (164). Kucherenko (2011) notes that programs of this type often specifically target children as part of a state effort to promote patriotism, and to pass the symbolism and importance of the war to new generations.

Popular films about the war are also prominent in Russian media culture (Kucherenko 2011; Norris 2007). The release of Nikolai Lebedev’s Star (Zvezda) in 2002 heralded “what can only be called an explosion of cinematic narratives about World War II. Including Star, sixteen feature films set during the war have appeared between 2002 and 2006” (Norris 2007:164).

Star features a group of Soviet soldiers who are on a dangerous reconnaissance mission behind enemy lines. Following a series of heroic exploits, they discover German plans for a massive attack and must steal a German radio to warn their comrades. While the group is able to get the message to the Soviet front, all are killed in the effort. The subplot is that the film’s main character is in love with a radio operator at the front, in what Norris calls a “nod to wartime romance often present in Soviet films” (2007:168).

Star is a new type of Russian war movie, however. The realism of the film’s violence and its impressive special effects led it to be viewed as a response to Saving Private Ryan and other American blockbusters about the war (Gladilshikov 2002). Star was the first film to be funded by the state through the Ministry of Culture as part of a larger effort to inculcate patriotism and to keep the war foremost in the minds of the Russian people (Norris 2007). The film is more along the lines of an action-adventure

---

22 American films played a disproportionate role in the films available for Russian audiences in the 1990s, due to the almost chronic shortage of funds during that time (Norris 2007).
Contrast this with Soviet-era films, which were almost without exception terrifying. Especially grim were portrayals of Soviet life under Nazi occupation. Perhaps the most popular of these films, or at least the best-known, is Elem Klimov’s *Come and See (Idi i Smotri)*, released in 1984. The film’s protagonist, Florya, a young Belorussian boy who had joined the partisans, endures a series of hellish experiences that culminate in the herding of an entire village into a wooden barn, which the Nazis then burn down. The psychedelic, almost circus-like quality of the violence in the film is highly disturbing—including a brief scene where a Nazi overseer roughly tosses a baby through an open window into the barn that is to be burned down with the rest of the villagers inside. Vengeance is the partisans’ in the end, however, when the Nazi commander’s convoy is attacked and he and his entourage are taken prisoner and then executed by the partisans. What might have been a tolerable denouement is marred when Florya’s object of boyhood infatuation, Glasha, is gang-raped by German soldiers as they withdraw from the village. Most Russians over the age of 30 are familiar with *Come and See* even if they have not seen it personally. When I would mention the film to someone who was familiar with it, I often got a non-verbal reaction that indicated watching the movie was traumatic.

Though these movies were made during different periods, they have commonalities. Chief among them is that there is no mention of Stalin or of the NKVD troops assigned to military units to ensure that orders are followed without question or anything negative about the Soviet conduct of the war in either (Gladilshikov 2002). In
other words, there is nothing to besmirch the character of the Soviet state for which the characters are fighting; the narrative of the war as sacred remains intact.

A note of caution is advised at this point, however, about the role of film in conveying the ‘official line’ of the narrative of the Great Patriotic War in Russia. Film is a highly subjective medium, on the part of both those who produce it and those who consume it. As Winter (2006) points out, “Multiple witnesses must yield multiple narratives, of which film forms but one element. To evaluate cinematic images of war, perhaps the best way forward is to interpret film lightly. Film surely cannot bear the weight of heavy interpretive agendas. This is not to reify film nor is it to suggest that film has no political echoes or origins; on the contrary, it is rather to urge a more complex and textured approach to works which are simultaneously artistic, thematic, formulaic, commercial, and political” (196). My point here is merely that the ubiquity of devices that convey the impression of the Great Patriotic War in a positive fashion is of interest to us, as is the extent to which the state has control of the production of these devices. Kucherenko points out that the state “controls more than 70 percent of Russian electronic media” (2011:5).

During the three months of my fieldwork in the fall of 2009, there were at least two programs dealing with World War II on television on any given night that I watched. These ranged from older, 1970s-era Soviet movies, such as *Try to Stay Alive* and *Blockade*, to documentaries about Hitler’s secret weapons, interview programs with veterans and former partisans, and recreations of famous battles. Every once in a while one could see foreign programs from places such as the (American) History Channel and French television, dubbed into Russian, that featured some aspect of the Soviet Union’s
role in the war. One channel is actually broadcast by the Ministry of Defense: Zvezda (Star) has as its logo a large red star, and its programming is devoted almost entirely to Soviet-era military fare, especially the Great Patriotic War.

In contrast, on 30 October 2009\textsuperscript{23}—the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Political Repression in Russia—television news stories that appeared on evening news were fact-filled items about particular ceremonies, not a discussion about the Stalinist repressions themselves. After spending the evening carefully monitoring the television channels available in St. Petersburg until after midnight, I noted only one program about Stalin’s Terror or political repression—a half hour program about the fate of children whose parents had been killed during the Terror, which came on at 12:30 a.m. During my entire three month stay in Russia, I saw only three programs on Stalin’s Terror, of which this was one. The other two were a German documentary about the Katyn massacre of roughly 10,000 Polish army officers by the NKVD in 1941 (although not nominally part of the Stalinist Terror, I include because it was critical of Stalin and the NKVD), and a Russian program about Stalin’s personality cult. The only prominent newspaper I could find that devoted any coverage of the Day of Remembrance commemoration was the often critical Novaya Gazeta.

**Contrasting Characteristics of the Terror and the Great Patriotic War Narratives**

\textsuperscript{23} While an officially recognized Day of Remembrance for Victims of Political Repression, 30 October is not a work holiday, as opposed to 9 May (Victory Day), commemorating the victory in the Great Patriotic War, which is.
In Russia today, the Terror is a story, when told, of victims, not crimes. And victims seldom make for engaging portrayals in historical memory. As a Memorial official put it, “Veterans [of the Great Patriotic War] get called in to speak to classrooms, to tell students stories, to inspire them. Who would ever want to bring in [a former prisoner]? Could you imagine the stories he would tell?”

Consequently, there is an absence of heroes in the narrative of political repression. This is not the case with the narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Most schoolchildren know the name of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, the 18-year-old partisan girl who was tortured and killed after setting a diversionary fire to a stable during a partisan operation in 1941. She was posthumously named Heroine of Soviet Union. Every boy who learned how to shoot a rifle during mandatory military training knows the name of Vassily Zaitsev, the deadly sniper at the Battle of Stalingrad, whose heroism and marksmanship were later depicted in the 2001 film *Enemy at the Gates*.\(^{24}\) They have become age-appropriate symbols of sacrifice and heroism in the name of victory. There are no symbols of martyrdom and heroism in the narrative of the GULAG.

In the Krushchev era, the memory of the Great Patriotic War was intimately tied to the memory of the crimes of the Stalin era (Roginsky 2008). But what has changed in the intervening years is that the memory of the war no longer dwells on the sacrifices necessary for victory (Adler 2005), or the poor decisions made by the Stalin along the way (Foranova and Morozov 2009), it dwells solely on the victory. Roginsky (2008) notes that there is a “conflict of memories” implicit in this:

If state terror was a crime, then who was the criminal? The state? Stalin as the head of state? But we won the war against Absolute Evil, and so we were not the

\(^{24}\) For an interesting and in-depth discussion of the origins and contextual role of this film in Russian cinema, see Youngblood (2007).
subjects of a criminal regime, but a great country, the embodiment of everything good in the world. It was under the rule of Stalin that we overcame Hitler. Victory means the Stalinist era, and the terror means the Stalinist era. It is impossible to reconcile these two images of the past, except by rejecting one of them, or at least making serious corrections to it. And this is what happened—the memory of the terror receded. It has not disappeared completely, but it has been pushed to the periphery of people’s consciousness.

In Soviet times, victims of political repression took some comfort in the belief that their tribulations had at least been for a nobler, higher purpose—that of preparing for the war and contributing to the “Soviet ideal” (Figes 2007:129). But this may also contribute to the hesitancy to address the Soviet past, especially the Stalinist era, because “[f]or many Russians, coming to terms with the nation’s past requires reassessing the meaning of their personal past and that can be wrenching. For the older generation, so much of their lives was intertwined with the goals and aspirations of the Party that recognizing how badly things turned out would be especially unsettling” (Adler 2005:1101). It is easier simply to take refuge in one’s more pleasant memories.

The Great Patriotic War, by virtue of its rebranding as a Russian achievement, has given veterans a new status in society. Their sacrifices have been redeemed as the narrative of the war and especially victory in it, and they are treated with a kind of reverence, after having been ashamed of their service during the early post-Soviet era (Tumarkin 1994). By contrast, victims of political repression have little to celebrate. There is no national group or organization for former political prisoners in Russia. Many feel that no one wants to hear their stories (Figes 2007; Hochschild 1994). For many GULAG survivors, their experiences are a closed area of memory that they do not dwell on and do not speak about. This was a common consequence of being labeled an “enemy of the people,” or even being the relative of one. As one woman, whose parents were shot
by the NKVD in 1938, told me: “So I’m the daughter of an ‘enemy of the people’? What can I do, where can I go? I ended up in an orphanage, and finally in school and was able to get a job as a secretary. But I could never tell anyone about my parents. Even so, it took me years to get a propiska [document allowing one to live in a certain area]. There were other girls [whose parents were killed] at the orphanage too, and we never talked about our parents.”

Discourse about the war also has the benefit of being trimmed of inconvenient and damaging facts. The current narrative holds that the Soviet Union was invaded without provocation and fought and won to defend itself and the world from Nazi domination (Wertsch 2002). It did this against tremendous odds and with enormous sacrifice on the part of the Soviet (now Russian) people. Negative aspects of the war mentioned above are not in narrative evidence.

Discourse about the Stalinist Terror, however, is incoherent, fractured, and compartmentalized. This is true even among Stalin’s supporters, who variously ignore, minimize, or justify the repressions (Shlapentokh and Bondartsova 2009). In the main, the Stalinist purges have been incorporated into the discourse of the war as a necessary but unfortunate phenomenon born of a need to prepare for the coming of war. As the war narrative is increasingly emphasized by the political elite in Russia, the significance of the repressions is concomitantly downplayed (Gudkov 2005).

With the narrative of the Great Patriotic War ascendant in Russia today, it is unlikely that there will be any sort of expanded role for the narrative of the Stalinist Terror. It is even less likely that there will be any sort of official accounting for these crimes. Lastly, it does not appear that this situation will be changing any time soon. As
we shall soon see, younger generations in Russia today are being taught a modified version of Soviet history that is heavy on the achievements of the Stalinist period and light on the significance and substance of that era’s political repression.
Chapter 3: ‘Soft Memory’ Part II

At the base of the modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor ... The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence (Gellner 1983:34).

Introduction

Bernstein once noted that “Education is a relay for power relations external to it” (1990:168). Some of the ways that this relay occurs is that the political elite manipulate discursive interpretations of history in order to perpetuate the status quo, and to shift these power relations over time. This often involves situating historical events so that they conform to the ideology of the political elite. The role of education in the transmission of the ideological ideals of the political elite is well represented in the literature (e.g. Apple 1993; 1979; Gellner 1983; Gramsci 1971; Luke 1996; van Dijk 2008; Zajda and Zajda 2003). In critical discourse analysis, education is particularly important for several reasons. First, because it is one of the primary mechanisms through which individuals acquire the cognitive scripts that provide context to other forms of discourse transmission, such as media accounts (van Dijk 2008; 2006; 1993; see also Wertsch 2002). That is, previous discursive experience provides a context for the presentation of historic events in the classroom, even as one is learning new information about those events (Armbruster 1986; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983; Anderson et al. 1978). For example, in Russian society, the discursive dominance of victory in the Great Patriotic War as the paradigmatic event of the Stalin era has already provided some of the
reference points for students’ understanding of it. That is, people passively obtain cues about how to understand the war simply by living in society—going shopping, watching television, talking with friends, reading the newspaper, and so on. These reference points in turn can make students more receptive to the manipulation of this discourse in the classroom (van Dijk 2008; 2006). Second, textbook narratives are significant because they purport to represent the ‘truth’ of historic events. As de Castell notes, “textbooks are a ‘purpose-built’ technology for the transmission of accumulated cultural and scientific knowledge that has been accorded the status of fact” (1990:80). Textbooks therefore have an authority that makes challenging their content difficult (de Castell 1990; Luke et al. 1983). This is compounded by reliance on tests of textbook knowledge as the standard for “student progress, for selection or exclusion from further educational opportunity,” and which often forms the basis for evaluating teacher competency (de Castell 1990:80). The primacy of textbook authority “limits the kinds of reading practices to which teachers might otherwise be able to introduce their students” (de Castell 1990:80), constricting teacher agency and reinforcing their role as “reproducers” of dominant narratives (Bernstein 1990:139).

There is a great deal of deference to teachers in the Russian educational setting. During Soviet times, students wore school uniforms and were addressed by their teachers with the familiar pronoun “ty,” as opposed to the more formal “Vy.” As Markowitz notes, “Recognition of their physical and intellectual maturation was denied by speaking to them as one would address little children and pets” (2000:18). In Russia today, adolescents are still considered children. As such, they are expected to be deferential to elders and those in positions of respect, such as schoolteachers. This is reinforced in both
language, as indicated above, but also in the deeds of young people in Russian society (Markowitz 2000:27). Young people are expected to give up their seats on public transportation to elderly persons and veterans, for example. And they will be told to do so by others if they do not. When I was first studying in Russia, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, older Russian women still retained their public role of admonishing disheveled-looking young people (of which I was apparently one) to “tuck in their shirts,” or tie their shoes.

This deference, which I observed personally throughout my time at university in Russia, as well as during several visits to Russian high school classrooms, gives teachers substantial authority, and reduces the possibility of student agency, which is already quite limited, in questioning material that is taught. The idea of students as agentic, as Davies (1990) has noted, is problematic even in more open societies; for one, because of the desire on the part of students to correctly fit in with the collective discourse, and for another, teachers "control the flow of events" in the classroom and "provide authoritative interpretations for the group" (357). We will return to students and teachers in subsequent sections of this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that teacher authority in Russia is substantial, and this gives greater impact to the state-sponsored narratives that they are required to teach in reproducing state-sponsored discourse.

In this chapter, I focus on state control of narratives about the Stalinist period in the Russian educational system under Putin. By systematically analyzing textbook narratives, counting the lines of text devoted to positive and negative aspects of Stalinism as they are presented in these texts, and quantifying the use of passive voice and omission of agency, I show that the political elite manipulate the composition and content of these
narratives in order to emphasize what they view as positive aspects of the Soviet state, such as political centralization, while minimizing negative ones, such as political repression. There are four main elements to this process that were evident in all of the textbooks examined. The first of these is that political repression under Stalin is addressed in the context of being an unfortunate byproduct of the need for the Soviet Union to industrialize. Second, there is a near total absence of agency in the perpetration of political violence as portrayed in the texts. Third, that the analysis of the Stalinist Terror is truncated into simplistic terms, without any consideration of the human rights dimension of large-scale extrajudicial killing and imprisonment. Finally, the use of language in describing the Stalinist repressions and victory in the Great Patriotic War tends to portray the former very matter-of-factly and the latter in glowing patriotic terms.

The hegemony of the message lies in the history textbooks that contain it—textbooks that contain alternative narratives are simply not authorized by the Ministry of Education and Science. As noted in the literature (e.g. Zubkova 2009), and as several teachers pointed out to me during interviews, state-approved history textbooks of twentieth century Russian history, and a teacher’s manual that one textbook is derived from are made available free of charge by the government to any school that agrees to use them. These are the only textbooks, on any subject, that have such status within the Russian Federation. For this reason, they have a wider readership than perhaps any other textbook, and teachers I interviewed stressed that these were the main textbooks in use in

---

25 The Russian Ministry of Education was renamed the Ministry of Education and Science in 2006
26 The teacher’s manual in this case is significant. Scholars studying Russian textbooks have asserted that the manual in fact preceded the textbook, which was then crafted around the narrative in the manual (Brandenberger 2009; Zubkova 2009). The two books are provided in tandem for use in Russian schools.
the Russian Federation. I devote substantial attention to the analysis of these in this chapter.

I will begin by tracing the development of the current narrative of the Stalin era as it is portrayed in textbooks throughout the Russian Federation, demonstrating that there have been substantial changes over the years. These changes reflect both the ideological ambivalence of Yeltsin and his coterie about the Soviet period (Smith 2002), and the contrasting resolute desire of Putin and his elite to portray the Soviet era positively (Sherlock 2007a). Because the political elite under Putin have positioned Stalin as the symbol of the Soviet era, this has necessarily involved re-framing his role in its history by accentuating the positive aspects of his rule.

Finally, I will examine some of the pedagogical difficulties that teachers face when attempting to find ways to give more comprehensive accounts of the Stalinist period. This includes problems familiar to their American counterparts, such as disinterest in the subject matter, as well as incentives for teachers to “teach to the test.” The Ministry of Education and Science has also limited the amount of class time available for teachers to cover complex phenomena such as the Stalinist Terror.

The Changing Face of History: Assessing the Soviet Period

In the later Gorbachev years, glasnost-era revelations about the darker side of the Soviet past, especially the Stalin era, surfaced in the public sphere for the first time since the Khrushchev period. So much information emerged, particularly in the period 1988-
1990 (Davies 1997), contradicting what was written in history texts that exams for that discipline were cancelled not once but twice (Smith 1996). In the ensuing years, multiple versions of history textbooks emerged, as did myriad teaching perspectives on the meaning(s) of Soviet history (Zajda and Zajda 2003; Sherlock 2007a; 2007b).

Even as a deluge of new information became available to teachers and historians, there was no ‘central’ perspective during this period, no ‘right answer’ about how to portray the Soviet period. Levintova and Butterfield (2010) suggest that “this was hardly surprising given that textbook adoption and financing in the 1990s was decentralized to the regions and textbook production was transferred from Soviet-era ministerial control to the post-Soviet marketplace” (141). During this time, many textbook authors sought to connect post-Soviet Russian history with pre-Soviet myths and symbols, although this was not an official requirement.

During the Yeltsin era, as my interview data attest, what one learned in school was often subject to the particular notions of the individual teacher. A woman from Moscow, who was in the ninth course\(^\text{27}\) in the early Yeltsin years, explained to me that, “I had no idea that anything was supposed to change in the [textbooks]. Our teacher was very pro-Soviet [gestures for emphasis], and she thought all the talk about how bad the Soviet Union had been was awful.” Her friend [they were in the same class together] agreed, saying, “She was always saying things that were completely different from what we could read for ourselves in the newspapers.”

\(^{27}\) Although it varies somewhat, this is generally the time when Russian students begin to study twentieth century Russian history. It is the rough equivalent of the American sophomore year in high school. Students in Russia continue the study of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through the eleventh course.
A St. Petersburg woman of approximately the same age had a very different experience. She felt that her ninth course teacher was very critical of the Soviet period and of the Stalinist repressions in particular. So much time was devoted to negative aspects of the Stalinist period that she grew tired of hearing about it: “Every day, that’s all we would hear.”

Post-Soviet educators had wide latitude in determining how to present the history of the Soviet era, and they had a variety of sources from which to choose in this presentation, given the wealth of new information and a nascent plurality of educational materials. Several textbooks appeared almost simultaneously, all of which were critical of the Soviet period, and the Stalinist epoch in particular (Davies 1997). Many of these textbooks drew from and emphasized examples from pre-Soviet history that connected them to a larger Russian, as opposed to Soviet, identity (Merridale 2003; Zajda and Zajda 2003). This was in keeping with the overall national crisis of identity that ensued following the break-up of the Soviet Union, when Yeltsin and his camp also sought, with little success, to link Russia with its pre-Soviet past (Smith 2002).

An example of textbooks from the early post-Soviet period was Igor Dolutskii’s Otechestvennaya istoriya XX vek (History of the Fatherland in the 20th Century), approved by the Ministry of Education in 1994. This textbook, which emerged from a competition for new Russian textbooks, was very liberal and anti-Soviet. In contrast to other texts that sought to establish links with the pre-Soviet Russian past, however, it also railed against the Tsarist regime (Sherlock 2007a). Dolutskii’s textbook was a mainstay in Russian history education throughout the 1990s, alongside others such as Nikita Zagladin’s Istoriya Rossii i mira v XX vek (History of Russia and the World in the 20th
Early on in his first term as president, Putin made it clear that he saw “history education as an important tool for legitimizing his personal authority and his approach to state building and state-led modernization” (Sherlock 2007b:217). To Putin, this meant putting forth a narrative that glorified the Soviet period as an era of Russian greatness (Morozov 2008; Sherlock 2007a). In 2001, he assembled his entire cabinet “specifically to analyze the content of textbooks and study guides on contemporary Russian history” (Levintova and Butterfield 2010:141). Shortly thereafter, Putin notified the Russian Academy of Sciences that he wanted it to review the content of all history textbooks currently in use in the Russian Federation (Sherlock 2007b). This marked the beginning of the vetting process for history textbooks by state agencies in the post-Soviet period. In 2003, Dolutskii’s textbook was withdrawn from the list of officially approved textbooks. That same year, Zagladin published a new textbook, *Istoriya Otechestva, XX vek* (History of the Fatherland in the 20th Century), that portrayed the Soviet period far more favorably than his earlier textbook, and which catalogued the achievements of “socioeconomic modernization” that occurred during Stalin’s rule (Sherlock 2007b:228). The removal of Dolutskii’s textbook signaled that the plurality of perspectives on the Soviet, and especially Stalinist periods that had existed throughout the Yeltsin years was over (Sherlock 2007b).

The reverberations of Dolutskii’s fall from favor were quick in coming. As Sherlock (2007b) explains, “Although the Russian Ministry of Education was quick to deny that a purge of textbooks was in the offing, Putin’s attack on Dolutskii clearly put
the academic and educational establishment on notice that the Russian president viewed
history education as an important tool for legitimizing his personal authority and his
approach to state building and state-led modernization” (217). Historians began to modify
earlier versions of their textbook narratives, or to produce less critical variants. This was
especially true as concerned the Soviet period of Russian history. In one of the current
textbooks that is provided to schools free of charge, the authors are quite forthright in the
book's introduction about their positive portrayal of the Soviet Union: "The Soviet Union
was not a democracy, but in the area of social policy it was a guide and an example of a
better, fairer society for many millions of people all over the world" (Danilov et al.
2012:6)

In the Putin years, new textbooks and teaching guides have appeared on the list of
textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. The major change is the
way that the Stalinist period is portrayed. My analysis of these texts demonstrates that
they focus on positive aspects of Stalin’s rule, devoting unusual attention to political
centralization, and the state-driven modernization and industrialization that resulted from
it, to the detriment of narratives of political repression (see, for example, Danilov et al.
2012; Danilov et al. 2009; Volobuyev et al. 2007; Filippov 2007; Danilov and Kosulina
2006). Several of these textbooks were authored or edited by academics with close
connections to the Kremlin (Liñán 2010). Two of the more conspicuous of these are
Aleksandr Danilov and Aleksandr Filippov. The former has been involved as an author or
co-author of several textbooks that are heavy on Stalin’s accomplishments, while
minimizing events such as the Terror.28 The latter wrote a teachers’ manual that was so

28 The version of Danilov and Kosulina’s textbook examined here is apparently a newer version of the same
title that was also approved by the Ministry of Education in 1995. Davies (1997) wrote of the earlier
starkly pro-Stalin that it received substantial criticism in the Russian and Western press, and is co-author with Danilov of one of the main textbooks provided free to schools (Danilov et al. 2009).

Education and Discourse Control in Post-Soviet Russia

During Soviet times, education played an especially important role in inculcating state prescribed ideology (Brandenberger 2009; Zajda and Zajda 2003). In order to ensure that the history portrayed was in line with ideological and political goals, manipulation of historical discourse occurred early on in the Soviet educational system. There were also no competing narratives in the Soviet portrayal of history. The state produced a single message for consumption and provided the textbooks that carried that message (Ferro 2003). The situation in Russia today is similar: the state approves only those textbooks that contain the message that aligns with the ideological goals of the political elite.

In Russian high school curricula, as interview data from teachers and textbook passages indicate, the coverage of the Stalinist period focuses primarily on the political centralization that characterized that time, along with the industrialization that is argued to have been the result of it. Textbooks strongly imply, and sometimes explicitly state, that Stalin’s centralizing of the ‘power vertical’ was the mechanism that allowed the industrialization of the Soviet Union, which was required to defeat Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War. The war is covered in great detail, and victory in it is explicitly version that it was “objective and more thoughtful [than other accounts of Stalinism]” (124). The new variant has evidently been modified to meet the requirements for approval by the Putin administration.
portrayed as the result of Stalin’s centralized state. The Terror, and the repressions that came before and after it, are minimized. While the main events of the Terror are nominally addressed, the overriding impression one gets is of the importance of industrialization and modernization. This is significant, because the coverage of the Putin era in contemporary history textbooks is eerily similar to that of the Stalin era—Putin is portrayed as centralizing power in order to govern more effectively (Filippov 2007). Political centralization is portrayed as necessary in order to manage economic and development crises. Filippov (2007), in particular, links this to a historical tradition of harsh rulers in Russia, such as Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible, who used their authority to accomplish great things for the Russian state.

It bears noting that the Russian Federation is not alone in manipulating historical discourse in education. All states do this to some extent, in order to inculcate patriotism and/or unity, which is often achieved through the mythological presentation of significant historical events (Sherlock 2007a). In some cases, this involves a dramatic and often controversial re-interpretation of history. In Japan, for example, textbook content is manipulated by the state in order to minimize human rights abuses by the Imperial Japanese Army in China prior to World War II (Barnard 2001).

My research shows that historical discourse of the Stalinist period is manipulated in several ways by the political elite through the vehicle of the Ministry of Education and Science. First, the state provides free textbooks to schools that convey its sanctioned historical ‘line’, as determined by the political elite. It also limits the textbooks that may be used should schools decline ones provided by the state, by vetting textbook content and approving only those that convey the state-approved version of Soviet history.
Second, it controls the number of hours that teachers are required to devote to particular aspects of Stalinism. Specifically, it has expanded the amount of time spent on the Great Patriotic War while limiting the amount of class time devoted to the study of political repression under Stalin. Third, it minimizes and depersonalizes the horror of the political repressions by reducing them to faceless dates and statistics to be memorized. As interview data attest, this reliance on knowledge of rote facts as opposed to any critical analysis is significant because the knowledge of dates and figures are the “types of information that students must know” in order to successfully pass a state examination in Russia.

The effect of these policies is that Stalin’s repressions come across as unfortunate and even cruel, but necessary for the survival of the Soviet Union. The feature of the Stalinist era that is emphasized in the state’s textbook narrative is that, as one former teacher put it, “Stalin may have been a bastard, but look at how he modernized!” The man then turned to me, smiled, and said, “Of course, the same could be said of Putin.” The Stalin narrative emphasizing the importance of the centralized state corresponds with the current political elite’s own political centralization for the purposes of economic modernization and state control of the economy (see Sherlock 2007a; Bremmer and Charap 2007).

In the years after Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, his administration worked quickly to reverse critical portrayals of the Soviet period that had become the trend in school textbooks throughout the 1990s. While scholars such as Sherlock (2007b) have noted the “decay” of the more liberal, i.e. anti-Soviet, historical narratives even before the time of Putin, tolerance of anti-Soviet discourse in the sphere of education was
severely limited in the early Putin years (205). The political elite, as part of a proclaimed larger project to portray the Soviet past in more patriotic and unifying terms, became directly involved in the production of historical discourse that was to be disseminated in schools across Russia (Zubkova 2009). The two issues that they appear to have focused on were negative portrayals of Soviet conduct during the Great Patriotic War and frank portrayals of political repression during the Stalinist period. In the following sections, I analyze textbook narratives that reflect the current state-sponsored discourse of the Stalinist period.  

The Narrative of Political Repression under Stalin in State-Sponsored Textbooks

In this section, I will address several features of the Stalin narrative. The first, as mentioned previously, is that the narrative of Stalinist repression is subsumed into the larger narrative of industrialization; that is to say that repression is portrayed as a constituent part of the industrialization process (Danilov et al. 2012:250-251; Danilov and Kosulina 2007:205). The process of industrialization is, in turn, appended to the war narrative, and is characterized as required preparation for the coming war. This narrative also portrays the state centralization that occurred under Stalin as the mechanism which allowed for effective command and control of the processes of industrialization and modernization, and that without this centralization, these processes would not have been

---

29 Two of these textbooks, (Danilov et al. 2009 and Danilov et al. 2012) are provided to schools by the state. Two others (Danilov and Kosulina 2006 and Volobuyev et al. 2007) are generally available for purchase at bookstores, but have also been approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.
successful. All of the textbooks that are provided or approved by the state use language that implies or specifically states that Stalin’s repressive measures were necessary in order for the Soviet Union to industrialize (Danilov et al. 2009; Danilov and Kosulina 2006). Further, the narrative specifically avers that without this industrialization, the Soviet Union would not have won the war with Nazi Germany (Filippov 2007). This perspective is consistent with societal discourse on the Stalinist period and the relationship between Stalin’s repression and the Great Patriotic War.

The second feature of the Stalinist narrative that appeared often is that when the Terror is addressed in the texts there is an almost complete absence of its perpetrators; the text refers solely to victims. In one textbook, agency for the decision to initiate the Terror is attributed to an individual, but it is to Nikolai Yezhov (then the head of the NKVD), rather than Stalin, who is said to have given the order (Danilov et al. 2009:256). Further, the Stalinist Terror is often described without contextual information that would enhance comprehension of its scope and significance, and is frequently phrased in a confusing way. This is one of the elements of discursive manipulation, because when passages are unclear in a text, it becomes difficult to access the mental template, or schema, needed to process the information and commit it to memory (van Dijk 2008: 218-219; 2006:365). It is easier simply to skip over such passages and resume where a recognizable schematic template again becomes apparent.30

Third, while the Terror is described in some detail in the state-provided textbook, I will show that the ‘analysis’ of that period consists of two alternative evaluative approaches: 1) the Terror as negative because of the decimation of the Soviet officer

---

30 For a more thorough discussion of schemata, see Anderson et al. (1978); for comprehension failures due to schematic problems, see Armbruster (1986); also van Dijk and Kintsch (1983).
corps that was part of it, which in turn weakened the Soviet Union in advance of the war, or 2) as justified because there was a legitimate threat from a “fifth column” of spies, saboteurs, and the like operating in the Soviet Union prior to the Nazi invasion. These are the only two perspectives offered (see Danilov et al. 2012:257). There is no discussion of the Terror in the context of the nature of the killings and arrests that took place during this period, nor is there any suggestion that there might be other versions of this event. The Terror is sometimes framed in the context of Stalin eliminating potential adversaries, which might seem to contradict the above. However, the passages that offer this view are isolated from context. There is no attempt to qualitatively evaluate Stalin murdering potential political opponents. Further, this explanation of the Terror is usually an addendum to the aforementioned industrialization. Stalin's repressions are portrayed as a pragmatic solution to the difficulties the Soviet Union faced in the pre-war years. As Zubkova explains it:

The authors of the new course construct a rational foundation for Stalin’s repression and explain the motivation for the purges he conducted: in other words, they prove that his actions were logical. The problem is that the text does not mention that this logic was criminal, as were the methods. Neither Filippov’s book, nor the textbook based on it [Danilov et al. 2009], define this clearly (2009:862, emphasis in the original).

Fourth and finally, I will compare the use of language in the textbooks to demonstrate how the Stalinist repressions and the Great Patriotic War are treated. This will show that the language used to describe the Terror is matter-of-fact, impersonal, and dry. In descriptions of the war, however, positive adjectives, names and portraits of
heroes, and flowery prose abound. Let us now turn to some specific examples and more extended analyses.

Repression as Necessary for Industrialization

Example 1: The majority of important objectives of the first five year plan were built by the hands of prisoners, among them Belomor Canal, linking the White and Baltic Seas. 100,000 prisoners dug the enormous foundation area without the use of modern technology. Construction of the canal was managed at four times cheaper than economists’ estimates (Danilov and Kosulina 2006:205).

In this example, the emphasis is on the importance of the projects on which prisoner labor was used. The use of prisoners is implicitly justified by its cost-effectiveness, i.e. “four times cheaper” than the project might have cost were prisoner labor not used. There is also no discussion of what might have been achieved if the prisoners had had access to “modern technology.” The text is accompanied by a small (5x5 cm.) black-and-white photograph of a painting in the lower right corner of the page, depicting three prisoners straining to pull a heavy load while a guard menaces them with a small whip. Nowhere in the surrounding text do the authors explain where the 100,000 men who make up this convict labor are coming from. It is unclear whether a student is supposed to think that the GULAG housed common criminals, but there is no accompanying information that would lead him or her to think that mass arrests and detention on groundless charges were a large part of what made such feats possible (Applebaum 2003), as political repression and the Terror had not been discussed at this

---

31 All translations are those of the author.
32 As Soviet industrialization projects went, the Belomor Canal was a colossal white elephant. Despite the enormous amount of effort expended on the project, the far more efficient Soviet railway system made use of the canal impractical, as did its rather shallow depth, at just over 11 feet, although it did see use (see Applebaum 2003).
Example 2:
The fourth category of citizen whose labor was used intensively in solving the problem of industrialization were prisoners … The labor of prisoners became included in government plans [with] the [GULAG] camps as a sector of the economy. In 1938, 1,851,000 people were housed in camps. By 1 March, 1940, the GULAG consisted of 53 camps, 425 corrective-labor colonies, counting approximately 1,600,000 prisoners (Danilov et al. 2009:250-251).

In this example, taken from one of the state-provided textbooks, prisoners are listed as one in a number of different categories of 'citizens' who were enlisted in solving the problem of industrialization. Other categories include peasants, engineers, and servicemen. This discussion is part of a section describing the "system of stimulated work" (systema stimulirovaniya truda) that Stalin designed to facilitate rapid industrialization (Danilov et al. 2009:249-253). But there is a lack of context in this passage, as prisoners appear as one of several categories. There is no explanation of who these prisoners are or from whence they came. Nor is there a characterization of their labor, which was forced. While prisoners are singled out as valuable contributors to the industrialization effort, one may easily interpret this as prisoners voluntarily contributing to this effort, especially as several of the other categories of labor are all portrayed as enthusiastically contributing their labor to the endeavor. Even more notably, there is a large black-and-white photograph in this section that takes up almost half the page (10x20 cm), showing a (voluntary) female labor brigade whose members are all smiling as they carry tools to the work site (Danilov et al. 2009:250).

The photographs in these sections are important, because they provide powerful semiotic reinforcement of the accompanying textual passages (Kress and van Leeuwen...
Photographs not only amplify dominant themes in the text, but they may obfuscate already marginalized ones, for example, by providing a sense of sentimentality (Berger 1992). Lastly, visual images contribute to the recall of information with which they are associated, enhancing the extent to which they become part of memory, for example, when gruesome photographs are used in museum displays about the Holocaust (Butler 2003).

The Narrative of the Stalinist Terror: The Absence of Agency

Example 1:
According to official, clearly understated (yavno zanizhennym) data, in the years 1930-1953, for accusations of counterrevolutionary, anti-state activity, 3.8 million people were repressed, out of which 786,000 were shot (Danilov and Kosulina 2006:221).\(^{33}\)

In this example, the information is presented in the passive voice, which is a manipulative technique that averts the placement of agency (van Dijk 2006:373). The text assigns no responsibility to these deaths and incarcerations. Certainly this is a question that might spring to the mind of an inquisitive student: “Who shot 786,000 people?” Providing agency would have been easy enough to do by making the tense active and attributing agency to Stalin, or to the NKVD officers who physically arrested and shot people on his orders. Further, there is no additional explanatory information to put these figures in context. For example, there is no explanation of the ubiquitous but nebulous

---

\(^{33}\) As noted earlier, there is considerable controversy about the true number of victims of Stalinist repression in general and of the Terror (1937-1938) specifically (see Wheatcroft 2000; 1999; Ellman 2002; Conquest 1990). Ellman puts “repression deaths” for 1937 and 1938—deaths that occurred as a result of execution, mistreatment during transit, or execution or other intentional killing while in the camps—at 950,000 to 1.2 million (2002:1162). He estimates the number of prisoners in the GULAG during the period 1934-1953 at 18.75 million, although he notes that this figure is likely a bit high owing to some people being incarcerated (and counted) multiple times.
term “repressed.” There is also no denouement; no discussion of what happened to those repressed people who were not shot outright. This would seem to be important information. Did these people survive their incarceration in the camps? No further data is provided and the text instead begins a new section on the Soviet Constitution of 1936. Finally, the outdated figures used, in keeping with the authority of the textbook mentioned earlier, convey the sense that the actual numbers are somehow not important enough for the textbook authors to have bothered with, or that there was a conscious attempt to mislead about the significance of the Stalinist Terror. Even current official Russian estimates put the death toll for executions at almost 700,000. This textbook was published in 2006—long after both Western and Russian scholars had agreed that the actual number of victims of the Stalinist Terror was higher by several millions.

Example 2:
Victims of the legally unjustified mass repressions were representatives—old and young—of all social groups in Soviet society. According to current data, from 1930 to 1953, 11.8 million people passed through corrective labor camps and 6.5 million passed through colonies, that is, 18.3 million altogether. Of these, 3.7 million were sentenced for 'counterrevolutionary' crimes (20.2 percent). 786,098 of the accused were sentenced to the highest form of punishment (vysshii mere nakazaniya). From the position of human rights the death and destruction of people's lives cannot be justified (Danilov et al. 2009:257).

Again, the passive voice is used to give what is a reasonably accurate tally of victims of the Stalinist Terror. Several things stand out in this particular example, which is taken from a state-provided textbook: the first is that, again, there is no agency given to the phenomenon, it is a tally of victims not a portrayal of their deaths and incarceration at the hands of a perpetrator or perpetrators. The second is that there is no explanation of the phrase “legally unjustified,” which would be easily accomplished by changing the phrasing to say "illegal" or "unlawful" or some other term that might disallow their
justification for a reason other than that of law (such as the need to industrialize). Third, the use of the innocuous-sounding phrase “passed through” the GULAG suggests incarceration as a transitory, almost fleeting, experience, rather than an event often lasting years or even decades (if one survived the experience). Further, the use of the term “passed through” implies that prisoners returned to a life of normalcy. In fact, however, many former prisoners experienced stigma, discrimination, and other severe difficulties attempting to readjust to life outside the “zone,” as prisoners refer to the GULAG (see Adler 2002; 1999). Fourth, there is no explanation of why people were arrested. What does it mean that 20 percent of these people were arrested for counterrevolutionary crimes? Why is that term in quotations? Along these same lines, the use of the official Soviet euphemism for the death penalty, the "highest form of punishment" seems confusing and unnecessary. It would have been just as easy, but perhaps odious, to say that these people were sentenced to death. Finally, the strange phrasing of the last sentence makes it unclear whether the "position of human rights" is something to which the textbook authors subscribe. The implication, which is heavily reinforced in the subsequent sections, is that the death and ruin of people's lives may not have been justified from the "position of human rights," but that they were justified in some other sense—for example, in the name of industrializing the Soviet Union. It is to this perspective that we now turn.

*The Portrayal of the Strong Centralized State in Textbook Narratives*
Examples abound of text excerpts justifying or explaining the Stalinist Terror as a necessary price to pay, given the exigencies of industrialization. These examples are taken from “summary sections” of text passages, which tie together the phenomena of Stalin's repression, industrialization, and the centralization of the Soviet state.

Example 1:
In the 1930s the Soviet people managed a truly historic feat. This was a powerful spurt of development that qualitatively transformed the socio-economic and cultural character of the country, changing its place in the world. Tremendous achievements were made through incredibly dramatic efforts, for which a high price was paid. Solving these enormous challenges was the state-political system, which took on a mobilized character. Built on harsh centralization, in the spirit of wartime, it managed to ensure the concentration of available resources in the most crucial areas. A combination of coercion and moral stimuli, using fear and enthusiasm, created by 'strengthening of vertical authority', solved the problems that faced the country at the end of the 1920s (Danilov et al. 2009:257).

This example is from the same page in the state-provided textbook as the previous example describing the scope of the Stalinist Terror. This block of text follows it immediately and seems to provide the justification for the Terror, while allowing that "a high price was paid" for the achievements described. This example also illustrates the use of descriptive terms that provide a qualitative aspect to the portrayal of industrialization. Whereas in the descriptions of the Terror there are no adjectives such as "terrible" or "criminal," in this section one encounters positive characterizations such as "truly historic," "tremendous achievements," "incredibly dramatic efforts," and "enormous challenges." This signals to students how they should interpret the phenomenon of industrialization, and how they should weigh it relative to the human costs associated with it. In this passage, which presents industrialization in a positive light, agency is nominally attributed to the faceless 'state-political' system, although there is substantial accompanying information in the surrounding text that makes this recognizable as Stalin's
achievement. This is in contrast to previous examples that focus specifically on the Terror, in which agentic connections are absent. Other examples go further, specifically crediting Stalin with the impetus for industrialization.

Example 2:
For the swift industrial push created by Stalin, the highly centralized totalitarian system proved to be more effective than its alternative—democracy with a market economy. [This system] made it possible to overcome the qualitative delay of industry within a historically short period of time, putting the Soviet Union in the ranks of great industrial powers. It also led to a complete breakthrough in the level of education among the [Soviet] population, without which further progress was not possible (Danilov and Kosulina 2006:246).

This example provides a revealing illustration of how textbooks demonstrate the benefits of the centralized state, comparing it to democracy with a market economy and declaring it to be 'more effective'. The achievements of such a state are of no small import—“putting the Soviet Union in the ranks of great industrial powers” and creating a “complete breakthrough in the level of education” in the Soviet Union. Again, agency is attributed to Stalin where positive portrayals of industrialization are presented in the text. By emphasizing the positive aspects of industrialization, the repressions become merely part of the “high price” paid to achieve it (Danilov et al. 2009:257). As the next example illustrates, these two elements of the narrative are often counterpoised.

Example 3:
Stalin physically eliminated the people able to create real opposition to his regime. But at the same time, he managed to acclimate the bulk of the people to the task of modernization (Danilov et al. 2009:323)

In this example, agency is directly assigned to Stalin. The use of the term “physically eliminated” here misleads the reader about what that term signifies, making Stalin’s crimes sound less monstrous. It would have been much less morally ambiguous
for the text to say for example, “Stalin murdered the people able to create real opposition to his regime.” Further, the scope and character of the Terror in this passage are reduced to pragmatic actions necessary for Stalin to preserve his authority. This presents the Terror as rational and necessary, if cruel. This characterization is also confusing, because at this point in the narrative students have already been told that millions of people were incarcerated in the GULAG, and that hundreds of thousands were murdered. Surely not all of those people were those “able to create real opposition” to Stalin's regime. Further, the expression “but at the same time” (no v to zhe vremya) signals that Stalin also did some good things in addition to eliminating the opposition; specifically, he was able to modernize the Soviet Union. But the narrative also rather directly states that this was what enabled the Soviet Union to defeat the Nazis:

Example 4:
The victory of the Soviet Union in the war with Germany was due to a variety of reasons. First among them is the economic factor—the creation in the 1930s of a powerful industrial potential (Danilov et al. 2009:432).

*The Brevity of Text Devoted to Stalin's Repressions*

The Stalinist Terror is given a relatively small amount of space in the narrative of the Stalin era. Considering that the Stalinist repressions impacted nearly every Soviet family in one way or another (Khlevniuk 2004; 2009), the amount of text devoted to them would seem wholly inadequate. As an example, the 2009 state-provided textbook by Danilov et al. has 82 pages devoted to the pre-war Stalin period. At roughly 40 lines of text per page, it has 3,280 lines of text, of which only 108 (or approximately two pages)
are devoted to various aspects of the Stalinist Terror. In other words, only 3% of the text devoted to the pre-war Stalin period discusses the Stalinist Terror, and as we have seen above, those discussions are both sanitized and truncated. Amidst this text, there are also two photographs: the first is a half-page, black-and-white of one of the so-called Moscow “show trials.” This particular photo appears to be from the 1936 trial of Stalin’s former associates Kamenev and Zinoviev (although there is no mention of them by name in the surrounding text, nor is there an explanation that these trials were rigged and their outcome predetermined by Stalin). There is also a small (3x4 cm) color photograph of the Solovetsky Stone in Lubyanka Square, a monument to the victims of political repression. By comparison, the Great Patriotic War, another event that affected every Soviet family in one way or another, occupies 109 pages in Danilov et al. (2009), at approximately 4,360 lines of text, or slightly over 25% of all the text in the book, and includes 47 photographs, and seven maps.

The 2006 Danilov and Kosulina textbook has 45 pages devoted to the pre-war Stalin period. Again at approximately 40 lines of text per page, this totals 1,800 lines of text, of which 97 are devoted to the Stalinist repressions. This represents just over 5% of all the pre-war text devoted to Stalin.

There is no mention whatsoever of the Stalinist Terror or political repression in the state-provided companion volume to Danilov et al. 2009 (Danilov et al. 2012), which covers the period 1945-2008. This is significant because it means that the only time Russian high school students will encounter the phenomenon of political repression and

---

34 This was the first of the "show trials" in Moscow that are often viewed as the precursor to the Terror that was to come. After Lenin’s death, Kamenev and Zinoviev had initially been equals with Stalin, but in 1936 they were suddenly accused of conspiring to murder him. They and 14 others submitted obviously false confessions (in order to spare their families), were found guilty, and shot to death at the Lubyanka.
terror in the Soviet context is in their brief exposure to pre-war Stalinist history. The
dearth of information about the Stalinist repressions may reflect the fact that the state
history exam does not focus on this aspect of the Stalin era. This is consistent with the
state’s diminution of the significance of the Stalinist Terror in school curricula. In a study
guide for the state history examination, for example, which contains five separate mock
examinations, the only question having to do with the Stalinist repressions is the
following: "What was one of the reasons for the failure and losses of Soviet military in
the war with Finland in 1939?" The answer given at the back of the book is: "The mass
repressions in the 1930s against the command ranks of the Red Army" (Gevurkova et al.
2010:18). The lack of state examination questions dealing with the Stalinist Terror is also
in keeping with the minimizing of the negative features of Stalin’s rule throughout
textbook narratives of the period. It is also significant because students in Russia are
highly attuned to what will be asked of them on the state exam, and they make sure that
their teachers are covering the material they need to know in order to pass the exam.

Thus while the Stalinist Terror is addressed in school textbooks, it is usually
situated in the context of industrialization or Stalin's need to consolidate and preserve his
authority. Where the political repression of the Stalin era is presented, there are several
features of it that appear in all of the textbooks analyzed in this chapter. The first is the
murder of Sergei Kirov in 1934. Kirov was the head of the Communist Party apparatus in
Leningrad, and his murder is portrayed as the event that provided the impetus for the
Terror to begin (Volobuyev et al. 2007:148; Danilov and Kosulina 2006:220-221;
Danilov et al. 2009:255). The second feature is the decimation of the Soviet officer corps
that occurred during the Stalinist Terror (Volobuyev et al. 2007:148; Danilov and
Kosulina 2006:221; Danilov et al. 2009:257). The destruction of the Soviet military leadership is particularly salient, because this is the aspect of the Terror that is given the greatest significance as a negative, although this is usually implied and not explicitly stated. During my fieldwork, this was the feature of the Terror that was mentioned most often in interviews as one of the regrettable things that Stalin did.

While these aspects of political repression under Stalin are common to textbooks, some devote more attention and some less to their discussion. The state-provided textbook, for example, addresses the destruction of Soviet military leadership in an indirect way (as part of a quotation), while the Danilov and Kosulina textbook enumerates the numbers and ranks of those killed, but does not specifically state that this was a bad thing that contributed to the Nazi successes early in the Great Patriotic War. This is in keeping with the general taboo against advancing negative aspects of the war's conduct (Fofanova and Morozov 2009).

*The Use of Language in Presentations of the Stalinist Repressions and the Great Patriotic War*

The totality of these examples illustrate what is true of the texts generally; treatment of the Stalinist repressions is dry and matter-of-fact. Moreover, victims are tallied without regard for how they became victims in the first place or who was responsible for their deaths or incarceration. By contrast, the process of modernization is framed in a positive way. But the use of positive adjectives is even greater where the war is concerned. Here death is posited as glorious and worthy of remembrance.

Example 1a:

And from the same volume:

Example 1b:

The names of those who died fighting the Nazis are to be written 'in golden letters', and the surrounding text describes the heroic efforts of the partisans fighting the Nazis. The names of the poets, writers, and artists are relegated to the footnote of having died while incarcerated. There are no adjectives in the text surrounding the latter deaths; there is no description of them having died from disease, malnutrition, or overwork, or whatever the case may have been. This is consistent with the portrayal of victims in the societal discourse of the Stalinist repressions. It is as if they died of some unfortunate accident.

The Great Patriotic War itself is portrayed as a time of difficulty, but also as a time of unity and purpose. As one of the state textbooks puts it, "The war years became a period of unprecedented unity and the rallying of forces by the Soviet people" (Danilov et al. 2009:405). Overall, the narrative of the war is heavy on the use of positive adjectives and descriptive terms that underline the patriotism and heroism of the conflict. Individual battles are also described in such terms, as this example demonstrates:

Example 2:
One of the most heroic pages of the war was the 250-day defense of Sevastopol. There [the Nazis] suffered approximately 300,000 men killed or wounded—so many that it equaled the losses in all theaters of operations since the [initial] attack on the USSR (Volobuyev et al. 2007:166).
Reinforcing the text’s exaltation of heroic combat, there is also a small (2x2 cm) photograph in the upper left hand corner of the page, showing Soviet defenders in what appears to be heavy combat during this battle. One soldier is firing from a prone position on a berm, while another has a grenade raised, ready to throw. Other soldiers are firing their weapons from various positions.

Perhaps the most controversial of the new history textbooks making an appearance during the Putin years is the teacher's manual of Aleksandr Fillipov. This volume is significant because, as a teacher's manual, it purports to instruct teachers on the proper perspective(s) about Russian history. It is also the template for the creation of the 2012 Danilov et al. textbook, which, along with a companion volume and the Filippov manual, are distributed to schools throughout Russia for free.

Direct Control of the Stalinist Narrative by the State: The Dominance of the Filippov Text in High School History Curricula

Aleksandr Filippov’s *Noveishaya Istoriya Rossii: 1945-2006* (Contemporary Russian History: 1945-2006) is the most controversial of the textbooks examined in this study. As mentioned previously, this book, which calls itself a “manual for teachers” (*kniga dlya uchitelya*) is so pro-Stalin that it has received substantial criticism in both Russia and the West (see, for example, Halpin 2007). It has also been the subject of several journal articles that note Filippov’s proclivity to portray Stalin’s repressive
policies in justifiable terms, citing the exigencies of the war and of the need to re-build after it (Korostelina 2010; Brandenberger 2009; Zubkova 2009).

The relevant feature of the Filippov text for this study is that it appears to be the version most directly constructed by the political elite (Brandenberger 2009; Zubkova 2009). Not only was the project of designing the narrative sanctioned by the political elite, but they allegedly provided the outline of the narrative itself (Brandenberger 2009). The simplistic nature of the text is designed “to facilitate the rapid and thorough absorption of the official history, with minimal reflection and doubt” (Zubkova 2009:862).

As the chosen historical narrative of the political elite, the book was released with a huge accompanying advertising campaign. It was the only textbook to receive such fanfare (Zubkova 2009). A variety of prominent personalities, among them the Minister of Education and Science and the First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, publicly spoke in favor of the Filippov text (Brandenberger 2009). Every year the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation publishes a list of textbooks that are ‘approved and recommended’—the highest status a textbook can receive (Levintova and Butterfield 2010). This list usually contains four or five textbooks per grade that have such status. The Filippov text is but one of these but, as Zubkova notes, “It is the main one” (2009:865, emphasis in the original).

Although the book is supposed to cover the period 1945-2006, it devotes an entire section—more than thirteen pages—to a general discussion of “Arguments about Stalin’s Role in History” (Filippov 2007: 82-94). In this section, Filippov portrays Stalin as a continuation of the strong state typified by Muscovite Russia from the fifteenth to the
seventeenth centuries, the Russian Imperial state from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and the Soviet Union. Filippov states that “the most essential elements of these [governing] principles were the concentration of power in one center and the harsh centralization of the system of governance,” which also includes the centralizing and marshaling of resources (2007:82). These are the features, Filippov notes, which characterized the reigns of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin (2007:82)—all of whom achieved great things for Russia, but at a tremendous human cost.

Filippov’s comparison of Stalin to other Russian emperors is done in the context of justifying Stalin’s policy of forced industrialization in advance of the war with Germany. He asserts that this allowed the Soviet Union to win that war, and become a superpower after it. Filippov argues that these feats would not have been possible without the repressive character of the strong centralized state: “[Industrialization] was achieved, among other means, by political repressions, which were applied not only to ordinary citizens (ryadovikh grazhdan), but to the administrative elite as well” (2007:88).

Filippov offers a fawningly positive appraisal of Putin in the book’s final chapter, implying that Putin’s centralized state is a model built upon the best features of prior Russian (and Soviet) rulers, such as those mentioned above. He also devotes much of his narrative to critical assessments of the Soviet Union and Russia’s post-Stalin leaders, such as Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin (2007).

It is difficult to overlook the positive portrayal of the strong state under Stalin and the equally positive portrayal of Putin’s strengthening of the “power vertical,” centralizing the Russian state in order to have it perform similarly heroic feats (see, for
example, Filippov 2007:442-447). But it is not merely the message that is shaping the discourse of the Stalinist period in Russia today. The method of delivering that message is also telling.

When I visited a school in St. Petersburg, I was shown a shelf of brand new textbooks that are based on the Filippov book. These were *Istoriya Rossii, 1945-2008: 11 klass. Uchebnik dlya uchashchikhsya obshcheobrazovatelnikh uchrezhdenii* (History of Russia, 1945-2008: 11th Class. Textbook for the Study of General Educational Requirements), written by the aforementioned Danilov, with several other authors, including Filippov. The teacher, whom I had come to interview, told me that the textbooks, 44 of them, were provided by the government free of charge. They were, as far as she knew, the only textbooks that are provided free of charge by the state.\(^{35}\) The Ministry of Education and Science provided the textbooks to be used by the students and Filippov’s manual for teachers described above. As we looked one of the exemplars together, she said, somewhat wistfully, “It’s all so ideological these days. The whole text is just very political.” When I asked if it was required to use the textbooks, she said, “Not yet” (*poka nyet*).

Other teachers told me the same thing. It is not a requirement that the schools use the textbooks provided to them by the government. Two factors, however, make it more likely that schools will opt to use them. The first is that most Russian schools, even the more specialized schools, are chronically underfunded. As in the United States, for example, teachers in Russia receive low salaries when compared to other professions. The teacher whose school I visited said, “It’s a joke we have that you don’t do this [go

\(^{35}\) This was confirmed to me by another teacher whom I interviewed and by several representatives of the Memorial organization.
into teaching] to make money.” To receive over forty textbooks, which can cost anywhere from ten to eighteen dollars apiece, is in most cases considered welcome assistance. The second, perhaps more alluring reason to use state-provided textbooks is that the unified state exam, which all Russian students must pass in order to graduate, is composed of material contained in the particular textbooks that the state provides.\textsuperscript{36}

There is therefore little incentive to be creative or to use materials other than those provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, especially because teachers are evaluated on how well their students perform on the exam. There is also scant time allotted by the state to cover subject matter associated with the Stalin period.

**Limiting the Discourse: The Changing Nature of School Curricula**

Schoolteachers in Russia repeatedly pointed out to me the lack of class time allotted to the issue of political repression and the Terror. One teacher stated that at her particular school—a specialized school for the humanities with “students from good families”—teachers are given three hours during the year to cover the entire Stalin period. This must be divided among the areas of foreign policy, economics, culture, and internal politics. As she noted, “This gives very little time to talk about the repressions. And in most schools, they are only given two hours to cover these subjects. It’s only because this is a special school that we get three hours. You know, this gives very little

\textsuperscript{36} I was told by this teacher that this changed in 2007. Prior to that, students had some choice in the particular topic over which they were to be tested. Now, as the teacher told me, “The test is the same all over Russia. There is no variation.”
time for analysis.” By comparison, she said, most schools are given between eight and twelve hours per year to cover the Great Patriotic War.

The change in the amount of class time allocated to these subjects was made during Putin’s second term as president in 2007. During the Yeltsin period, the number of hours devoted to the study of the war was reduced to four hours per year for the three years when the war was a topic of history classes (the ninth through the eleventh courses). Putin’s administration restored a substantial amount of time in which to study the war.

Another feature of the new curriculum is the increased emphasis on factual knowledge, as opposed to critical analysis of historical events and processes. This has occurred because the state exam that students must pass to graduate is oriented to facts, not interpretation or analysis. This was a point that was brought to my attention several times by teachers in interviews, who seemed frustrated by their inability to make any sort of qualitative judgment about what is important and what is not. A teacher told me,

It’s a pity, but the state exam (edinniy gosekzam) is the only measure of [a teacher’s] success. So you have to teach the facts: ‘In what year did something happen?’ These are the questions the exam asks. So you can do other things, for example, I show a film on the Katyn massacre, but that takes time away from the presentation of facts that the students know they need for the exam. And because the students know this, they ask why they have to see this film.

The emphasis on teaching factual knowledge at the expense of teaching critical analysis skills contradicts the stated goals of Putin and his administration, who aver that it is precisely this ability to reason critically that is important in education (see, for example, Kiselev 2005). Even Filippov’s teaching manual states that “the result of the

---

37 Sherlock notes that during Soviet times “the ninth grade alone devoted twenty-three hours to the study of the war” (2007b:213).
study of history should become not merely the knowledge of historical facts, but the ability to productively use abilities in the solving of professional and social problems” (2007:4). Contrary to pronouncements such as this, the reality in the classroom is that students are given facts on which they are tested, and the results of these tests are the measure by which both their and their teachers’ performance is evaluated.

The greater attention paid in the curricula to achievements of the strong centralized state that Stalinism created—to the detriment of the human costs of these achievements—is the salient feature of the political elite’s constructed discourse about Soviet history. Further, the methods through which this state was created, such as the elimination of the old Bolshevik order, and mass arrests and executions that occurred before, during, and after the Terror, are deliberately minimized in the historical narratives of the Stalin era sanctioned by the Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, the specifically limited allocation of hours that are allowed to be devoted to coverage of the Stalin period essentially relegates political repression to the status of a footnote—a date to be memorized. It is difficult to overcome this sort of structural bias in the curriculum. Webber (2000) notes that it was difficult for teachers to put their own ideas forward even in the later part of the Yeltsin period. It has become even more difficult under Putin.

The Decline of Interest in History in Post-Soviet Russia

During the Soviet era, students were taught a version of history that provided varying quantities of both factual knowledge and ideological indoctrination. The
particulars of Marxism-Leninism served to explain and justify the system of governance that surrounded students in their daily lives; as Bernstein puts it, “Educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience” (1971:47). The classroom environment also served to inculcate Soviet models of behavior, such as students’ subverting their own wishes in deference to the larger collective, and respect for elders (Markewitz 2000). It also helped students to define themselves in terms of a national identity, learning a shared history with their classmates.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideological dimension of history became irrelevant to many Russians almost immediately. The disparity between the Marxist-Leninist portrayal of Soviet history and the discrepancy with the emerging reality of revelations about the crimes of the Soviet system was so stark as to cause a sort of academic apoplexy in terms of how to reconcile the two. For example, the state even cancelled exams, and educators hastily sought new avenues of presenting revised material to students.

Communist ideology did not disappear overnight, however, as the interview data above demonstrate. A plurality of viewpoints about the meaning of Soviet history existed, and while some teachers chose to portray Stalin in a negative light, it was not necessarily a requirement for them to do so. It took time for new textbooks to be available in the schools, and in the meantime, as one former teacher told me, it was the task of the individual teacher to come up with suitable teaching materials. This often meant photocopying newspaper articles or other ad hoc solutions.

At the same time, it was apparent that the Marxist-Leninist history taught in schools had already become stale to a good number of students by the time of the Soviet
Union’s collapse. As a former teacher told me, communist ideology was already hackneyed and recognizable to students as something other than the truth of the system that surrounded them by this time. The new revelations that began appearing in the media during the late Soviet period, however, were something new. Many Russians enthusiastically consumed media accounts that more accurately portrayed the Soviet period, particularly under Lenin and Stalin (Smith 1996). Before long, however, this fascination with and concern about the past gave way to the present-day realities of life in a new political, social and economic environment during the 1990s.

More than a decade later, in today’s Russia, many students see history as merely another subject to be mastered to the extent that it “gets them out the door,” as one teacher noted. Merridale observes that the changes from the Soviet to the post-Soviet eras “are most obvious among the young, and especially those born after 1980, the children who grew up without the disciplines of a communist education. For them, history can easily appear to be irrelevant. Affluent teenagers in the cities, whose eyes are longingly affixed on travel, new jobs and money-making, cannot understand their parents’ continuing fascination with a story that was over before they were born” (2003:14; see also Markewitz 2000). My interview data support this. While taking to a group of students in Tomsk, I asked what they knew about the Stalinist Terror. One of them spoke up and said that he “knew enough about the Terror to pass the [state] exam.” When my taxi driver from the airport asked me what I was doing in Russia, I told him I was interested in people’s views on the Stalinist period of history. After a short pause, he responded simply but tellingly, “I’m going to business school, I never think about things like that.”
Implications of State Control of the Historical Discourse in History Curricula

The emphasis on economic modernization in Russian history curricula, and the assertion that this is best achieved by a strong, centralized state, has several implications. The first is that such portrayals make it easier for the elite to maintain the system that they have put in place in Russia, namely authoritarianism and state control over the economy. That these portrayals are at odds with established historical facts is not an issue of concern for the political elite (Zubkova 2009), despite their stated objectives in crafting pro-state narratives (Filippov 2007; Kiselev 2005).

The means by which the strong state narrative has achieved dominance in history curricula is indicative of the degree to which the political elite have inserted themselves into the process of manipulating the narrative. By minimizing or ignoring evidence that contradicts the official ideological line, the state simplifies the narrative for consumption. By providing for free the vehicle of that narrative, i.e. textbooks that carry it, the political elite ensure that it reaches its target audience. As van Dijk succinctly puts it: “In education, the overall constraint avoiding ‘controversial’ issues censors most radical social and political views that are inconsistent with dominant sociopolitical ideologies. More concretely, state organizations or corporations may supply free educational materials … and have other ways to influence teachers and textbook content” (2008:37).

Finally, history curricula that emphasize the rote memorization of facts without some critical analysis of historical phenomena associated with those facts makes students
much more susceptible to manipulation. As Bourdieu has argued, one of the primary objectives of education is to teach students not only what to think, but *how* to think (1971). That the state exam assesses students based on their factual knowledge, instead of on analysis and interpretation of the actual events behind the facts fosters this type of historical manipulation.

Many people in the West may marvel at poll results showing that Russian youth have mixed and even favorable feelings and ideas about Stalin and his role in Russian history. If, however, Americans were presented a version of history that emphasized the positive attributes and accomplishments of, for example, slavery, while minimizing its human costs, they might have very different perspectives on that period of American history. That, in turn, might well influence how their views of the present in terms of the outcome of the Civil War (and its symbols), race relations, and perhaps the economic configuration of the U.S. economy.

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated the parallels drawn in the discourse of Russian history textbooks between Stalin’s highly centralized strong Soviet state with its resulting success in the Patriotic War, and the Putin administration’s variant of the centralized state and economic modernization. The implication of these parallels is that a strong centralized state is, historically, the vehicle through which Russia has achieved its greatness. This view is demonstrated, for example, by negative portrayals of the more democratic Yeltsin era as a time of Russia’s loss of international prestige, the lack of a sense of national identity, and economic and social chaos.

Even for students who do not hold the above to be true, the situation becomes problematic because, in a school environment, it is not easy (or even possible) to
challenge the official version of history—especially if one wants to get good grades and graduate. This is assuming that students might somehow be armed with the knowledge necessary to do so in the first place. The distinction between persuasion and manipulation is that the latter “typically occurs when the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator. This may be the case especially when the recipients lack the specific knowledge that might be used to resist manipulation” (van Dijk 2006:361). School is where students are ostensibly to acquire such ‘specific knowledge’.

**Conclusion**

Portraying the Putin era as a continuation of a grand Russian and Soviet tradition of a strong state and the successes it can achieve may have consequences beyond merely the admiration of Stalin, mentioned above. Levintova and Butterfield, in their analysis of history textbook portrayals of the Yeltsin and Putin eras, have noted a “marked correlation” between the negative portrayals of the Yeltsin era and the positive ones of the Putin era in history textbooks and the cognitive associations of pro-Kremlin youth groups (2010:139). They conclude their study by asserting that, “The [Putin era] revisions of the high school history curriculum and the active support of the youth organizations [by the Kremlin] are part of the same Putinitist project” (2010:164).

Positive portrayals of the strong state do not occur solely in the educational system, as we have seen. Mass media and other discursive environments have an effect as
well. The school environment, however, is the one arena where the political elite have the most direct effect over the content of the message that is delivered to Russia’s youth. As Russian scholars have asserted, the foundational myth of victory in the Great Patriotic War is essential to the Russian understanding of self (Fofanova and Morozov 2008; Gudkov 2005). It is the narrative that students are required to know well enough to pass the state examination, but it is also the narrative that provides social cohesion and national identity (Kucherenko 2011). That is, it is a past that provides context and meaning to the present. In the historical discourse of the Soviet period as portrayed in history texts, priority is given to the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War as the grand achievement of Stalin’s centralized state— the building of which is portrayed as making this victory possible— while the human and social costs involved in the creation and functioning of that state are minimized. This is also seen in the arena of public space, in the establishment of memorials and commemorations to historically significant dates and phenomena.

---

As noted in Chapter 2, the word “victory,” in the context of the Great Patriotic War, is capitalized in textbooks, indicating its importance. See Danilov et al. (2012), Danilov et al. (2009).
Chapter 4: ‘Hard’ Memory

*A historical debate cannot provide a final conclusion to the question of memory—a monument does* (Etkind 2004:57)

Comparing Memorialization of the Great Patriotic War and the Stalinist Repressions

Introduction

This study’s previous chapters are crucial to the discussion of the memorialization process. Here, what Etkind calls ‘hard’ memory, embodied in the monuments, plaques, and memorials, comprise the physical aspects of memorialization. As Etkind notes, the soft memory gives context and significance to these physical structures that would otherwise remain “mute” (2004:40). Hard and soft memory interact with and are indispensable to one another. Memorials are the “crystallization” of often controversial discourses about not only what events are to be memorialized, but how and where they are to be represented (Etkind 2004:47).

The role of Russia’s political elite in controlling, or attempting to control, the processes of memorialization is well-established in the literature (e.g. Forest and Johnson 2002; Kucherenko 2011; Grant 2001; Nora 1996). Forest and Johnson have noted that in Russia decisions about what is memorialized, where, and how often involves contestation between different factions within the political elite over the symbolic significance of
historical events (2002). In this study, I agree with those who have asserted that this contestation has become much more muted as the political elite under Putin operate with a more similar world view than the political elite under Yeltsin (see Sherlock 2007a). This view is evident in the areas of education, media and the other networks through which discourse is promulgated by the political elite. The effect of this discourse has been the endorsement of narratives that emphasize and glorify the attributes of a strong, centralized state—embodied in the victory in the Great Patriotic War—while minimizing the narrative of the political repression that came along with the strong state.

In this chapter I examine memorials to the Great Patriotic War and Stalin’s political repression. I compare various museums and monuments using the following criteria: the physical existence, i.e. number, of such sites; their composition (i.e. the physical portrayal of the memorialized events); and finally the accessibility of these sites. This latter category includes such features as accompanying explanatory or contextual information, and English or other translations.

It should be noted at the outset that the war has a decided advantage over political repression in terms of memorialization, which is the fact that victory in the war was lionized during Soviet times. This explains some, but not all, of the preponderance of war memorials as opposed to those dedicated to remembering victims of Stalin’s political repression. There have been scores of new memorials to victory in the Great Patriotic War since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. These are still being funded by the state. According to several interviews with Memorial personnel, however, memorials to victims of the Stalinist repressions receive token amounts from the state, or, more often, no money at all (see also Etkind 2009; Roginsky 2008). An example of this is the killing site

---

39 For a discussion of a similar phenomenon during Soviet times, see Palmer (2009)
at Krasny Bor, near Petrozavodsk, discovered by a private citizen who uncovered the remains of more than a thousand victims shot in 1933 by Soviet security services. After requesting (and being refused) funds by the regional authorities to build a memorial, the man built one himself (Etkind 2009:183). Memorials to Stalin’s political repression are funded almost exclusively by private donations, which are simply no match for the resources at the state’s disposal in choosing what to memorialize.  

![Figure 1. Hand-lettered signs at the museum at the Levashovo Memorial Cemetery, indicating the number of victims buried there and the years in which they were shot by the NKVD.](image)

40 This is an example of the phenomenon described by Bachrach and Baratz (1962) as the ‘second face of power’, in which superior resources are marshaled by the dominant political power in order to counter attempts by opposition groups to advance their issues (see also Gaventa 1980).
States typically use memorials to display their own interpretation of historical events, whether the reasons are for purposes of commemoration, to convey the state-endorsed versions of historical events, to instill and foster a sense of national identity and unity, or all of these (Etkind 2004; 2009; Forest and Johnson 2002; Forest et al. 2003; Kattago 2009; Mayo 1988; Mitchell 2003; Viejo-Rose 2011; Winter 2006). The interpretation of these events, however, is always a constructed memory: “The work of memory is not just a process of selecting events and details, but also a way of constructing a story line or assessment of those events that is based on an explicit or latent interpretive scheme” [emphasis in the original] (Gudkov 2005:2; see also van Dijk 2008; Wertsch 2002). Memorials are symbols of a version of events that exists in a society’s collective memory; they are, to use Ladd’s words, “selective aids to memory: they encourage us to remember some things and to forget others” (1997:11). This means that the actual history of an event is less important than a mythologized version that has been stripped of extraneous or inconvenient details and made more palatable for public consumption (Kattago 2009; Kucherenko 2011; Rohdewald 2008). Gudkov refers to these mythologized histories as “collective conceptions,” which have been so far removed from the processes and ideologies that produced them that they are perceived by the viewing populace as agreed-upon opinions or ideas, whose origins are unclear, and that resist “any attempt to subject them to rational analysis” or to “taboo their sacred status as symbols of collective identity” (2005:3). The reproduction of memory through myth necessarily involves the state, in that the ways in which these myths manifest
themselves are “reflective of the particular configuration of power relations operative in society at a specific moment in time” (Mitchell 2003:446).

There is also a temporal dimension to memorials. They are palimpsests, whose meanings and symbolism take on different significance over time, though the structures themselves remain the same (Viejo-Rose 2011). The significance of structures may change as the narratives that they portray change or are used for different purposes by the state or by different groups of political elites (Forest and Johnson 2002). Mitchell notes that “Monuments constructed in the past can become static through time, then get re-energized as they are used ceremonially, as part of a spectacle or commemorative event. They frequently move from a passive space into a dynamic one, then back again” (2003:446). This is the case with many of the grander Soviet-era war memorials and spectacles that glorify victory in the Patriotic War, which has now been co-opted by the political elite as a Russian achievement. A conspicuous example of this is the annual Victory Day parade through Red Square in Moscow, which, having lost some of its pomp and circumstance during the Yeltsin years, experienced a revival with the Putin government’s decision to bring back the Soviet-era practice of having mechanized infantry and military vehicles, including tanks, join the parade (Aksyonov 2008).

Scholars are increasingly noting the importance of ‘experiential’ and spontaneous memorials (see, for example, Doss 2008; Shriver 2005). These allow visitors to vicariously experience history by viewing exhibits designed to evince a visceral, emotional connection to the past. This is achieved either through the use of static displays of historically significant sites at the time they occurred (as in the example of the Dr.

\[\text{41} \]

It is also common for the physical characteristics of a particular monument, statue, or other memorial site to change over the course of its construction as societal conceptions of the event to be memorialized changes (e.g. Grant 2001; Krylova 2004; Palmer 2009).
Martin Luther King museum, which offers visitors the opportunity to view King’s hotel room in Memphis exactly as it was at the time of his death), or by connecting visitors personally to victims of past tragedies, as at the U.S. Holocaust Museum, where visitors are not only exposed to displays of concentration camp settings, but given identity cards with the names and biographical data of actual Holocaust victims (Doss 2008). Another mechanism for transmitting experiential memory is to simply convert the actual sites on which historical events occurred into museums, as has occurred with Nazi concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz (Shriver 2005). Memorials to both the Great Patriotic War and to the Stalinist repressions reflect this turn to experiential memory in both the public and private spheres. Memorials to both have components that seek to personalize the phenomenon in question, although they achieve this to different extents.

**Discourse and Memorialization in Russia**

Because the discourse on the meaning and importance of victory in the Great Patriotic War is mostly consistent (see Kucherenko 2011), it is unnecessary for memorials to it to explicitly spell out what the structure in question is memorializing. It is understood from people’s everyday experiences living in Russia; that is, people may easily access the discursive ‘script’ of the war narrative (van Dijk 2008). If one wants
more detailed knowledge, they can enter one of the myriad museums dedicated to memorializing the experience.

The minimized discourse on the Stalinist repressions, and the dearth of accompanying information at these sites, is therefore more significant because the discourse of the Stalinist repressions is not something one would encounter in daily life. When viewing memorials to victims of political repression there is no clearly accessible reference point for recall of the narrative. Without such reference points, context—and hence, comprehension—is made more difficult (Baddeley 2003; van Dijk 2008).

Conflicting narratives in Russian society about whether these repressions were necessary but unfortunate; whether they in fact occurred, whether they were justified in order to save the country from foreign spies; or whether they were despicable acts of a murderous tyrant—all of which have an audience in Russia today—have complicated the already limited process of memorializing victims of political repression, and even called the legitimacy of that task into question.

Memorialization of the Great Patriotic War and of the Stalinist repressions has occurred in different ways and to different extents. The former occurs in what Nora refers to as “dominant” lieux de mémoires, or ‘realms of memory’, which are “spectacles, celebrations of triumph … imposing and usually imposed from above” (1996:19). This is a fitting description of some of the monstrous statues commemorating victory in the war, such as the complex at Poklonnaya Gora in Moscow, or the 100-meter statue of Mother Russia at Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad). There are approximately 70,000 such sites throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union (Schleifman 2001), and this does not

42 While museums are not part of what might be considered ‘public space’, because one must choose to enter a museum, for example, I believe that the fact of their existence is important enough to the memorialization process to consider them in this chapter.
take into account the plaques, signs and other physical reminders that are ubiquitous in Russia. In 2011, President Medvedev demonstrated the importance that the state attaches to these sites by pledging 2.5 billion rubles in state funds to aid in their upkeep. The state has sanctioned memorialization of the war, and has become the instrument through which it is memorialized.

By contrast, “there are now 1140 monuments and memorial plaques” throughout the former Soviet Union dedicated to the memory of victims of political repression (Etkind 2009:194). The smaller number of commemorative sites dedicated to political repression during the Soviet period has come about almost exclusively through private donations and fund-raising by non-governmental organizations (Etkind 2009; Roginsky 2008). Nora refers to these lieux de mémoires as “dominated” sites, which are “places of refuge, sanctuaries of instinctive devotion and hushed pilgrimages, where the living heart of memory still beats” (1996:19). This is an apt description of the memorials that stand at the secret NKVD burial site at Levashovo outside St. Petersburg, and of the killing fields at Butovskii Polygon in the Moscow suburb of Butovo.

The difference reflects and perpetuates the diminution of the role that political repression plays in Russian historical memory. The narrative of the Great Patriotic War is currently ascendant in Russian collective memory, due to its role as an anchor for a new Russian national identity and as an event demonstrative of the capabilities of a strong state (see Gudkov 2005; Fofanova and Morozov 2009; Kattago 2009; Mälksoo 2009). The dominant narrative of the war involves minimizing the Stalinist repressions as a necessary phenomenon required for the Soviet state to win the Patriotic War, so this

---

43 There are also more than 22,000 war burial sites located in foreign countries, the majority of which are devoted to the Great Patriotic War (Karlov 2010).
aspect of the Stalinist experience is not of great significance to the political elite in the memorialization process (Kattago 2009; Mälksoo 2009). The political elite attempt to keep the sanctity of the war narrative pure by minimizing state involvement in the process of memorializing political repression. As Kattago notes, memorials to the Patriotic War in Russia reflect “a mythical importance separated from the crimes of communism” (2009:150; emphasis in the original).

Memorials to the Great Patriotic War

Ubiquity of Physical Reminders

The Great Patriotic War is the single most memorable and commemorated event in the history of the Soviet Union, and now, Russia (Gudkov 2005). In his sociological travelogue of the USSR, The Russians (1976), Hedrick Smith devoted an entire chapter to the importance of the collective memory of the war years titled “World War Two Was Only Yesterday.” Anyone traveling to Russia for more than a few days will be struck by the prevalence of war memorials, plaques, and street signs all reflecting a deep commitment to remembering the Great Patriotic War. Unlike memorials to the war in other countries, however, the Soviet construction of the war narrative glorified victory while acknowledging suffering, and used this to legitimize the centralized state (Gudkov 2005; Kattago 2009). Kattago notes the distinction: “After World War II, negative or counter-monuments emerged in the West representing military death as overwhelming
loss without positing a higher cause to legitimate it. Soviet war memorials, however
continued and even deepened the mythical importance of military death as heroic
transfiguration in the name of the nation” (Kattago 2009:151; see also Niven 2007).

Plaques dedicated to the war are common in Russia. One of the side streets near
my flat in St. Petersburg has a plaque affixed to a building on the corner that reads: “This
street is named in honor of the Hero of the Soviet Union Allii Molgadulovoi, October 10,
1925 – January 16, 1944.” Many streets in the city are named after Heroes of the Soviet
Union who were killed in the defense of Leningrad, as the city was then known. In
addition, there are odd little reminders of the war, such as the stenciled sign on the wall
of the schoolhouse at 14 Morskaya Ulitsa, that reads as it did during the blockade:

Citizens! During times of artillery bombardment, this side of the street is the most
dangerous!

There are also many facilities commemorating the Great Patriotic War in St.
Petersburg, owing to its status as a ‘hero city’. In addition to Piskarevskoye cemetery
and the State Memorial Museum of the Siege and Defense of Leningrad, discussed
below, there is also the State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg, which is dedicated
primarily to the blockade of Leningrad; the Military-Historic Museum of Artillery, which
has an astounding array of World War II-era equipment, not just artillery pieces; and then
there is the Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad, centered on a 48-meter
high obelisk, this monument is a collection of bronze statues housed in black marble

44 St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) is one of the seven “hero cities” in Russia. The others are Stalingrad
(now Volgograd), Moscow, Novorossiysk, Tula, Smolensk, and Murmansk. Each has its own impressive
array of monuments, memorials, cemeteries other reminders of the heroism and sacrifices made by the
city’s inhabitant’s during the Great Patriotic War. There are also four hero cities in Ukraine: Odessa,
Sevastopol, Kiev and Kerch, and two in Belarus (formerly Belorussia): Minsk and the “hero fortress” of
Brest.
depicting various scenes during the defense of the city. It also has a below-ground museum to which one is guided while somber orchestral music plays. In the mausoleum-like interior, 900 bronze lamps flicker along with the steady ticking of the blockade-era radio metronome (described below at the Museum of the Defense of Leningrad).

Even in more remote areas of Russia, one encounters memorials to those who perished during the war. Improbably, on the Main Solovetsky Island in the White Sea (home of the first Soviet-era GULAG), there is a small thoroughfare running through the small village called Ulitsa Sivko (Sivko street). A small plaque at Number 1 reads in part, “this street is named in honor of Hero of the Soviet Union Ivan Mikhailovich Sivko, 1916-1941…” There is also a small granite memorial approximately 100 meters from the walls of the monastery on the island, dedicated to graduates of the island’s Soviet naval school who were killed during the war. Several small bouquets of flowers lying at its base indicated that it had been visited recently.

Figure 2. Memorial to naval cadets killed during the Great Patriotic War on the Main Solovetsky Island. The monastery walls are visible in the background. (Photo by author).
Access to War Memorial Sites

War memorials are centrally located, or are relatively easy to travel to. In St. Petersburg, across from the Moskovskiy train station, one can see the huge letters affixed to the top of the Hotel October: “Hero City Leningrad.” Because the city was repressed during Stalin’s time and the ability to construct memorials to the war or the 900-day siege was greatly curtailed, most of these monuments and memorials appeared either after Stalin’s death and some even more recently in the years since the Soviet collapse (Kirschenbaum 2006).

Walking along the city’s main thoroughfare, Nevsky Prospect, not far from Palace Square (Dvortsovaya Ploschad), one can see a small radio loudspeaker embedded into the granite façade of the building. An accompanying plaque tells one that this location was where residents of the city could gather to hear the latest news from the front or public announcements during the blockade. This is a relatively new memorial, for although no one I asked knew exactly when it was built, it was not there when I visited the city in 2003.

Another relatively recent development is the placement of street signs that indicate which direction to go when walking to a museum and even the distance remaining to get to it. In the case of the State Memorial Museum of the Siege and Defense of Leningrad the signs are even printed in English. This special status is usually reserved for the main tourist attractions in St. Petersburg, such as the Hermitage, the Admiralty and so on.
Figure 3. Sign in St. Petersburg indicating the route to the State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad, in Russian and English. (Photo by author).

All of the museums mentioned above are readily accessible by public transportation. It is possible to visit several different memorials in the same day, even if they are spread across the city. For example, the Memorial to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad—perhaps the most inconveniently located war monument in the city—is often visited when one is heading to the airport, as it is along a central route to Pulkovo, the
city’s main airport. It is located at a greater distance from the other museums which are clustered more in the city’s center.45

Typically, war memorials are located in or near city centers or along public transportation routes. The Great Patriotic War Museum, part of the sprawling Poklonnaya Gora complex in Moscow, for example, is easily accessible by a number of modes of public transportation, and a new metro station was built to accommodate visitors to it (Tumarkin 2009). The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow, located near the walls of the Kremlin, is also readily accessible by public transportation.

The grander of the war memorials, such as those mentioned above, are strategically placed in locations where they will be visited by large numbers of people, both Russian and foreign, because victory in the Great Patriotic War is considered to be the heroic achievement of the Soviet, and now Russian state. They serve as physical reminders that the strong state was capable of tremendous feats, and are consistent with the elite-sponsored positive portrayal of that state. Let us now examine the composition of two such memorial sites in the city of St. Petersburg: Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery and the Museum to the Defenders of the Leningrad Blockade.

Composition of Memorial Sites: Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery and the State Memorial Museum of the Siege and Defense of Leningrad

The composition of memorials is important for more than the aesthetics of the structures. Memorials are designed to resonate with people who share a commonly

---

45 For those people who do not have the time or wherewithal to make the trip to all of the major war-related sites around and outside of the St. Petersburg, several companies run tour packages to cover them in a day. One company offers guided tours of the battlefields around the city. Others cover both military and non-military aspects of the blockade.
understood history. They reinforce dominant discursive understandings of historical events in society. Memorials also often contain symbolic figures or icons that provide symbolic meaning to the phenomenon being memorialized. Whether it be figures of Mother Russia, a wreath of flowers at a makeshift gravesite, or a star symbolic of the Red Army, these features help to provide what Young refers to as the “texture of memory” (1993:ix).

The siege of Leningrad began several months after the initial German invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941. German and Finnish troops surrounded Leningrad and by September established a blockade which would last until early 1944 (although the Soviets managed to open a small corridor in 1943). The Germans attacked the city with artillery and aerial bombardments regularly, but the main killers were typhus and starvation. The memorials discussed here focus on this event.

Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery, or Piskarevskoye, as it is popularly known, is dedicated to victims of the siege of Leningrad. Opened in 1960, it is a huge compound, several acres, rimmed by neatly manicured flowers, bushes and trees. There are 186 mass graves at Piskarevskoye. Each of these is a mound the length and width of a freight train car, topped with grass, and at the head of each is a tombstone etched with the year and either a Soviet hammer-and-sickle, for civilian victims, or a star, for military ones. At the time of the blockade, Leningrad had roughly 3 million people—meaning that almost every other resident of the city died during it. Almost 500,000 Leningraders are buried here, out of the approximately 1.2 million who died during the blockade.

At the entrance to the cemetery there is a marble square, from the top of which emanates an eternal flame to the memory of the blockade victims. There is then a
staircase leading one down into the cemetery itself. From there one walks along the main path to a weather-darkened bronze statue of Mother Russia, holding a garland in outstretched arms. On the whitish-gray granite wall behind her are the words of Leningrad poet Olga Berggolts:

_Here lie Leningraders_

_Here lie citizens - men, women, and children_
_AWas next to them, Red Army soldiers._
_They defended you, Leningrad,_
_The cradle of the revolution_
_With all their lives._
_We cannot list their noble names here,_
_There are so many of them under the eternal protection of granite._
_But know this, those who look upon these stones_
_No one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten._

The cemetery is a wide-open space, with an elevated platform and stairs from which one walks down into the area with the mass graves. There are also two pavilions on the platform, with displays about the history of the blockade and artifacts from the period. Among the latter are pages from the notebook of 11-year-old Tatiana Savicheva, who recorded the dates and times of death of six of her relatives during the blockade, including her grandmother, two uncles, and mother. Savicheva herself died in 1943, after being evacuated from the city, of dysentery she had contracted while in Leningrad. A photo of the little girl is displayed next to her notebook pages, whose horrible content is incongruously written in a little girl’s hand.

This personalization of the war’s innocent victims is all the more powerful because the example is a child. But personalization is a featured characteristic in almost
every war museum in Russia. In addition to photos of those killed during the war, statues and sculptures memorializing the war are portrayed realistically, whether the example is Mother Russia as at Piskarevskoye, or concentration camp victims depicted in the sculpture “Tragedy of the Peoples” at the Poklonnaya Gora memorial to the Great Patriotic War in Moscow.

I was told by a former tour guide that during the Soviet period, Piskarevskoye cemetery was a required first stop for any tour groups visiting Leningrad during Soviet times. It is a powerful reminder of the suffering of the blockade years. It is also a potent symbol of the sacrifice of citizens that gives power and texture to the narrative of the Great Patriotic War.

Another prominent museum in St. Petersburg, the State Memorial Museum of the Siege and Defense of Leningrad, is rather obviously a well-funded state museum. The importance of the siege to the inhabitants of St. Petersburg is reflected in the neat façade of the building, on whose granite walls the museum’s name is etched on plaques in both Russian and English. Above the entrance, large red letters on a blue sign read: “Museum of the Defense of Leningrad.” Twin anti-aircraft guns flank each side of the heavy main entrance doors.

On my visit, I was pegged as a foreigner and seized by one of the dezhurnayas, or “women on-duty,” who took my coat to the coatroom and treated me to an account of the museum’s troubled history. Opened in 1944, not long after the blockade was lifted, the museum once housed more than 37,000 exhibits, including Tiger tanks and German aircraft that were used in the siege. In 1947, however, Stalin began a series of repressions

---

46 The Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow, for example, has several different displays that featuring personal memos, diaries, belles letters, and other memorabilia from the war that serve to personalize the tragic aspects of the war.
against the city, which he felt was getting too much glory for its heroic suffering during
the war, the museum was shut down, and, according to the woman, its director shot.\footnote{This was related to me in a matter-of-fact tone. On the same visit to the museum, I watched an official tour guide taking a group of children around the museum in an impromptu tour (a Russian family had requested a brief tour for their children despite the fact that it was not the scheduled time for tours), and when he was explaining the history of the museum, he gave the early history and then said, “And then, for reasons that aren’t important, the museum closed for a while and re-opened in 1989.”}
Many of the exhibits were destroyed or shipped off to other museums. The repressions
lasted until 1952, but the museum was not re-opened until 1989. I asked, but no
explanation was forthcoming about why it took so long to re-open, other than a
disseminate, “The time wasn’t right.”

Inside the main entranceway is an opulent main hall, with high ceilings and plush,
deep red carpeting. Dual crystal chandeliers hang over the marble floor. The stairway as
one walks up into the museum itself is framed by two large marble columns. On the wall
at the landing at the top of the stairs are three larger-than-life full length portraits of
prominent military officers during the blockade. Among them is a portrait of Andrei
Zhdanov, the Leningrad Party Secretary and the first commander of the Leningrad
front—who, as it turns out, was on vacation in the Crimea when the Nazi invasion
started, and did not return until five days after it was underway (Salisbury 1969:145).

As one turns and goes up another flight of red-carpeted stairs, one is struck by an
enormous portrait of Marshall Zhukov—the most famous of the Red Army commanders
during the war—atop a rearing stallion. I wondered if Zhukov was ever able to see that
portrait for himself, and if so what he thought of it. It must have been four meters wide by
six meters tall. Winding around the stairs there are framed posters from the present-day,
discussing or advertising some aspect of the museum and the blockade.
Inside the main hall on the second story is a small seating area with about 30 small wooden chairs. This area is reserved for presentations, usually to school children who come to the museum on field trips. Next to the door, there is also a small sign explaining a bit about the history of the museum. Omitted, however, are the particulars of the repressions against the city of Leningrad that closed the museum. With the exception of the signs telling visitors where the coatroom and bathrooms are, this is the only sign written in English in the whole museum. This is strange considering that the street signs telling one how to get to the museum are in English and its name is written in English on the wall outside. In the visitor’s book, there are several comments about this dearth of English-language information. It may have been the thinking of city planners that the visual aspects of the museum’s contents should suffice to communicate the experience of the Leningrad blockade.  

The displays are all remarkably well-done, and illustrate the city’s commitment to educate citizens and schoolchildren about the siege and defense of the city during the war. There is also a wide-ranging stock of materials from the period, including weapons, uniforms, diaries, official documents, photographs, artwork and Communist paraphernalia. Some of the exhibits are wordlessly terrifying: one in particular houses a Nazi SS uniform, and the silver “SS” runes on the rough wool of the greatcoat’s collar seem to exude evil. Others personalize the sadness and tragedy of the war and the blockade, such as the handwritten, fantasized menu of 16-year-old Valya Chepko, who

---

48 In thinking about it, there is some legitimacy to that—in my own case, I would have been impressed with the museum even had I not spoken Russian.
49 Schoolchildren and university students in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) are all made aware of the city’s history during the blockade (Kirschenbaum 2009). When I studied at university in St. Petersburg, for example, my Russian literature class spent a substantial period of time reading material from the blockade period. We were told that it was a mandatory part of the class.
created a tasty-sounding, several-course menu of the meal she would have when the blockade was over. She never got the chance as she died in February of 1942.

Most exhibits are behind glass, in cubicles, or set off in smallish rooms set up to emphasize one aspect of the period or another. For example, there is a cubicle with Soviet propaganda posters along with posters and billboard signs advertising theater and concert performances during the blockade. Another room is made up to represent an ‘average’ apartment interior during the blockade, complete with the saucer-like radio speaker that no home was without. Over this speaker, residents heard information about the fighting at the front and air raid warnings. When neither was being broadcast, there was a steady tick... tick of a metronome. According to the tour guide, the ticking was to give Leningraders the sense of the passage of time—that time was passing and there was an eventual end to their misery. It was also, as he put it, “to serve as the heartbeat of the city.”
Figure 4. A mock-up of a Leningrad apartment during the blockade at the State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad. The speaker on which Leningraders received broadcasts is on the table at right. (Photo by author).

These mock-ups also personalize the blockade. The apartment display looks quite lived-in, with personal effects and paraphernalia appropriate to the period. Another display is a mock-up of a bureaucrat’s office, with an old typewriter, a lamp, and a desk. Against the wall is a display case featuring a series of documents that describe the intense administrative effort that was needed to keep up with such things as the issuance of ration cards, coordinating evacuation efforts, and so on. The office mock-up has a studied disorder, suggesting that a person was deeply involved in his or her work.

Throughout the entire museum, Soviet banners, flags and posters abound, and the tenor of several exhibits is unabashed pride at the Soviet government’s handling of the blockade crisis. No mention is made of the poor planning before the beginning of the blockade, the mismanagement that contributed to the wholesale loss of precious grain stockpiles once the German invasion had begun, or of the NKVD detachments that sent dozens of ill-prepared civilians to the front by force once the siege had begun (Salisbury 1969).  

The museum’s portrayal of the war’s blockade years is consistent with the characteristics of the overall Great Patriotic War narrative, which stresses the sacrifice, heroism, and stoicism of the Russian people in the face of the terrifying invasion of the evil fascist invaders (see Wertsch 2002). It is also an example of the positive portrayal of

---

50 By contrast, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, has an entire exhibit devoted to the Roosevelt Administration’s consecutive failures to protect Jews during the Holocaust, even once it was aware that they were being systematically murdered in camps throughout Germany and occupied areas.
the Soviet period. The positive portrayal of the Soviet state as the unifying element in the
defenders’ resistance and the eventual lifting of the blockade is the underlying subtext to
many of the individual exhibits.

**Memorialization of the Repressions and the Terror**

*Dearth of Physical Reminders*

In stark contrast to the memorialization of the Great Patriotic War in Russia,
which has tens of thousands of memorials dedicated to it, the political repression of the
Soviet era is conspicuous for its absence of memorials. By varying accounts, there were
between 400 and 800 full-scale GULAG camps spread across the Soviet Union (Etkind
2004; Roginsky 2008). This does not include transit camps, or camps set up for specific,
shorter-term purposes. Yet there are slightly more than 1100 memorials to political
repression (Etkind 2009). As the historian Etkind put it, “One who is not dedicated to
pursuing the issue will be hard pressed to find a monument, a cemetery, or a museum
devoted to the memory of the Soviet terror” (2004:47).

Again to use the city of St. Petersburg as an example, there are two memorials to
the victims of political repression in the city itself: two statues of sphinxes located on the
banks of the Neva River and the Solovetsky Stone in Troitsky Square. Kresty Prison,
which was used as a transit prison during the Stalinist purges, could perhaps be
considered a third, were it not still used as a prison today. An additional memorial site outside the city is the secret NKVD burial site at Levashovo.

In Moscow, the two prominent memorials to victims of Stalin’s repressions are the Solovetsky Stone in Lubyanka Square, which was formerly occupied by a large statue of Cheka founder Felix Dzerzhinsky, and the State Museum to the GULAG. One might consider the killing field at Butovskii Polygon, located in the Moscow suburb of Butovo a third such site.

In the Siberian city of Tomsk, there are two memorial sites to Stalin’s repressions: one is a monument on one side of Leninsky Prospect, and the other is a former NKVD prison that has been turned into a museum. The monument is a cage-like stone affair, with the words, “To the victims of political repression” etched into it. The NKVD museum is more prominent, with a large sign facing the street advertising its contents.

There is only one GULAG camp in existence in Russia today. This is the former GULAG and then strict regime camp located just outside the village of Kuchino at Perm-36. It has been turned into a museum, with the help of the Memorial organization. According to the film shown at the camp, the practice during Soviet times was for the KGB to raze a camp once it had been decommissioned in order to hide the fact of its existence. The fact that Perm-36 managed to escape that fact is a fluke. Again according to the film, the KGB did an incomplete job of bulldozing the facility.

---

51 A strict-regime camp is along the lines of what Americans would call a “maximum security” prison, although strict regime camps usually incorporate some sort of labor. After the GULAG system was dismantled in 1960, strict-regime prisons or camps replaced the GULAG-era term, “corrective labor camp” (*ispovitelno-trudovoi lager*). Strict-regime prisons and camps both still exist in Russia today.
Access to Memorial Sites

By design, the actual sites on which killings took place, bodies were buried, or camps were located are often remote.\(^5\) The security services responsible for the more hands-on aspects of political repression usually cloaked their activities from the public (Paperno 2001). This makes gaining access to the actual places where these events occurred difficult, even when one is sufficiently motivated.

The secret NKVD burial site at Levashovo is a 45-minute train ride outside of St. Petersburg. When one departs the train, one must wait for a bus or one of the taxi vans (*marshrutki*) to take one along the Gorskoye Highway to the cemetery. This requires knowing on which side of the road to stand, because there is a three-way intersection in the village that makes it somewhat confusing as to which vehicle is going which way. Knowing Russian is perhaps not essential, but helpful in this task.

Getting to the NKVD killing field at Butovskii Polygon, in the Moscow suburb of Butovo, is also not an easy task. Butovo is almost an hour away from Moscow by car, even with average traffic. There is no easy public transportation route to the Polygon, as it is tucked away in a rather remote corner of the suburb. In the event of my visit to the site, it took almost twenty minutes of one of my companions asking directions of local residents before someone knew what she was talking about. There were no signs pointing the way along the route, even once one was in the Butovo suburb.

One might think that the Perm-36 strict regime camp would be located in the city of Perm. In reality, it is about 80 miles away. In my particular case, it took several days

\(^5\) Although this was not always the case: Thousands of victims of the Stalinist Terror perished in transit points or interrogation centers located in city centers (see Applebaum 2003; Paperno 2001). Roginsky (2008) also notes this when he observes that many structures in Russia could become memorials to the Terror simply by affixing a sign to them.
just to find a taxi driver willing to take me there for less than 150 dollars. After thoroughly questioning the receptionists at my hotel, and attendants at the local information and tourist offices, there did not seem to be any sort of public transportation that went out to the former camp.

Having secured a taxi, the journey took over two hours. Other scholars have noted that it can take as long as four (Adler 2005). The comparative brevity of my journey probably owed much to my driver’s hair-raising 120-kilometer-an-hour pace over snow and ice-covered two-lane roads. Despite this—or perhaps because of it—the trip seemed very long. We passed the Chusovaya River, the banks of which were lined with fir trees as far as the eye could see. Then there was about an hour of flatland, with odd bits of scrub brush. A while later we passed ice fishermen on the Shalashnaya River, and then more fir and aspen trees. Finally, we turned off of the major highway and drove on smaller side roads until we passed the small village of Kuchino. Down the road from the village we turned in to the entrance for the Perm-36 camp.

The most difficult to access of the sites I visited were the Solovetsky Islands, home of the first Soviet GULAG. More colloquially known collectively as “Solovki,” the islands are located in the Onega Bay in the White Sea. On paper, the islands seem relatively straightforward to get to. There is a daily flight from Arkhangelsk, on the southeastern shore of the White Sea, and there are ferry crossings from the western port of Rabocheostrovsk during the tourist season, which extends from roughly May to mid-September. The reality, however, is somewhat different, especially if one is traveling on a budget. The flight is pricey by Russian standards, at about $230 roundtrip. It is also something of a hit-or-miss travel option, as it is often cancelled due to fog, rain or wind—
all of which are common on the White Sea—or for no reason at all. Ferries are also subject to the vagaries of the weather on the White Sea, but in any case, they only run during the tourist season.

For those traveling to Solovki during the off-season, at least until the Onega Bay freezes over during winter, the main viable option is taking a train to the small town of Kem and then a taxi to the port at Rabocheostrovsk, where one may haggle with ship captains whose vessels are carrying construction materials, food, or other supplies to the archipelago. This suited me, primarily because it was the cheapest option, but I was also intrigued, as this was essentially the same way that prisoners were transported to Solovki during Stalin’s time.53

The trip did not turn out as planned. Having found a small vessel whose captain was willing to take me, passengers had to wait most of the day in the cold while the barge the boat was to be towing was loaded. Then, with everyone aboard, we were given the word that a storm was brewing and we would not be leaving that day. After being stuck for the night in Rabocheostrovsk, we got underway the next morning only to have a storm come up during our five-hour crossing. The boat pitched so violently that a little boy in the passenger hold threw up, and everyone seemed sick, scared, and miserable.

53 Kem was once a transit point for prisoners destined for the GULAG. Prisoners would be shipped there by train, and then to Rabocheostrovsk where large vessels would then take them to the main island. From there, prisoners would be assigned to one of the several camps that formed the larger Solovetskiye Lagerya Osobogo Naznacheniya (‘Solovetsky Special Purpose Camps’), or SLON, around the archipelago.
Figure 5. The monastery on the Main Solovetsky Island coming into view from across the White Sea. (Photo by author).

The isolation of many of the sites where killings took place and GULAG camps existed means that it is something of a difficult task to bring home the experience of political repression by, for example, having students take field trips to these sites. (Although in the cases of the Levashovo and Butovo killing fields that might be more feasible for students in St. Petersburg and Moscow, respectively). Further, many of the museums dedicated to the memory of political repression exist at these very sites.

That the actual sites on which prisoners were imprisoned and killed often exist in remote locations is immutable. Memorials to the events that occurred at these sites,
however, which were constructed much later (i.e. during the post-Soviet period), could have been situated anywhere. Yet these memorials are often placed in out-of-the-way locations where they are unlikely to receive a great deal of exposure (Roginsky 2008).

The sphinxes in St. Petersburg, for example, lie along a desolate section of the Robespierre Embankment of the Neva River, half a mile from the Chernyshevskaya metro station. There are no shops, parks, or public transportation stops nearby. There is nothing in the area that would cause someone to have to walk past that site. So these memorials do not become part of the daily, collective “normal” life, as memorials to the Patriotic War do.
Figure 6. The memorial to victims of political repression on the Robespierre Embankment along the Neva River in St. Petersburg. (Photo by author).

Some of these sites are so off the beaten track that local residents are not even aware that they exist, as was apparently the case in searching for the Butovskii Polygon, mentioned above. Similarly, I spent almost an hour asking perplexed locals how to get to the Solovetsky Stone in St. Petersburg—despite the fact that I was less than a block away from it. No one I asked had ever heard of it.

Other sites are not so much isolated as they are improbably located in areas where one would not expect to find them. The State Museum to the GULAG in Moscow, for example, is located off a side street and through an obscure archway in an otherwise commercial district in Moscow. The incongruous nature of the location discourages spontaneous visits, and leaves the memorial segregated from the daily routines of collective life.

Composition of Memorial Sites: Solovki and the Perm-36 Strict-Regime Camp

Solovki is relatively well-known among the older generations in Russian society. It has a fearsome reputation as one of the harshest labor camps used during the Stalinist repressions. Solzhenitsyn wrote about it in his Gulag Archipelago, although the author was never imprisoned there. (This is a point of contention for survivors of the SLON, who feel that no one who did not experience the horrors of the camps there is entitled to chronicle them). The poet/musician Vladimir Vysotsky sang songs about Solovki,
notably the ballad *Banka po-belomy*. Whenever I would tell people about my research, and that I planned to go to Solovki, they would get quiet and say something such as, “Well, yes, you need to go there, don’t you?”

Yet it was almost immediately apparent that the GULAG was not the main tourist draw to Solovki. Indeed, although the island chain was notorious for its GULAG, the SLON was now mostly a secondary side-attraction for the Russian tourist crowd. While below deck in the boat prior to our departure for the archipelago, a young mother asked me (as the obvious foreigner) why I was going to Solovki. I told her I was doing research on Stalin and wanted to see the site of the first GULAG. She seemed puzzled, and I wondered if she had perhaps not heard the term, as had been my experience with some younger Russians. I offered, "You know, Stalin's labor camps." She looked around at the other passengers, and asked, "There was a camp there?"

On the island, at the top of a hill overlooking the monastery below, there was a large sign, printed in Russian and English, touting the island as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The vast majority of the sign was dedicated to the Orthodox monastery. It mentioned the islands’ darker heritage as well, and in the first paragraph, but with the kind of incorrect, mixed-message portrayal that would become familiar the more I examined official government speech regarding political repression. The first paragraph of the sign read:

> Dear Guests!

> The Solovetsky Islands are a unique cultural, historical and natural site. It is also one of Russia’s most revered sanctuaries. The Solovetsky Islands were a forced
work labour camp (GULAG) for the thousands of political prisoners during the Stalin era (1920-1930).

(This was the English version, which was to the right of a large map of the islands. On the left side was the Russian, from which the English was directly translated—with the exception of the mention of Stalin. In the Russian version, “the Stalin era” is replaced by “political repressions.”)

The SLON officially began operations in 1923—although it had existed unofficially as a prison island for years before that (Applebaum, 2003; Brodsky 2002). The early Bolshevik government had been exiling opponents to Solovki since the summer of 1920 (Solzhenitsyn 1973). Further, the facilities on Solovki were closed down in 1939. 1920 to 1930 and 1923 to 1939: that is a six-year time difference. Surely the officials responsible for this sign were aware of what years the SLON was operational. It is a fairly simple historical fact that has been amply documented in official Soviet records.

The phrase “during the Stalin era” is also factually incorrect. Lenin died in 1924, and several years passed before Stalin was considered to have consolidated his power base. In any case, Stalin himself lived until 1953, so the years cited on the sign were clearly incorrect. The SLON was closed in 1939, so again, why this particular choice of years? All of this information is fairly easy to come by for a researcher. It would seem that it might be better-known still by the municipal authorities on the island.

One of the more obvious reasons for the incorrect dates might be that they excluded the years at the height of the Stalinist Terror: 1937-1938. Khlevniuk notes that “Between October 1937 and February 1938, more than 1,800 Solovki prisoners were shot
More generally, the garbling of information is consistent with scholars’ assessments of discursive manipulation achieved by phrasing information in a confusing fashion, or by omitting key pieces of information (see van Dijk 2008).

Finally, referring to the “thousands of political prisoners who suffered here” does not reflect the fact that approximately 800,000 prisoners passed through the gates of the SLON and served sentences on one of the camps peppered around the islands (Brodsky 2002). This number included women and children as well, as spouses often accompanied their husbands and wives while they served their sentences. This is attested to by one of the buildings pointed out to me by the restoration workers in a quadrant of Solovetsky village, which has a small sign affixed to it noting that it served as barracks for the “children’s colony during the time of the SLON until 1928.”

At least there was a sign drawing visitors’ attention to the fact that there was a GULAG here. At Sekirnaya Gora, which was the site of a notorious punishment camp on the island, there is no such notation. Nor is there any easy way to get to Sekirnaya—I paid fifty dollars for an hour-long slog over treacherous roads in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to get there. During the time of the SLON, conditions at Sekirnaya were so harsh that comparatively little is known about it, because no one ever returned to tell about the experience. There is a small cathedral on the top of the mountain with its cupola painted a deep crimson red, the basement of which housed notoriously brutal punishment cells. Outside, there is a long steep wooden staircase down the side of a cliff down which guards used to throw prisoners in the short period during the SLON that it was forbidden

---

54 The manipulation of figures pertaining to the SLON also occurred in archival material, where the total number of prisoners shot during the period mentioned above is (incorrectly) listed as 1,200. See Khlevniuk (2004).
to shoot them outright. Most of the time, however, prisoners were shot in the back of the head at the base of the stairs. I was told by several of the restoration workers on the island that one can find bullets used for this if one spends a bit of time looking on the ground at the bottom of the staircase. Nearby, a large wooden cross is all that stands as a memorial to the thousands of prisoners who died on Solovki (Brodsky 2002). While Etkind (2004) describes a plaque near the cross explaining its significance, I could find no such plaque. I was unable to visit any of the other camp sites of the SLON, for example, where logging operations took place, because the Russian government does not permit tourists to visit any of the other islands in the Solovetsky archipelago without a paid guide and the express permission of the municipal authorities.

My visit to the former GULAG site at Perm-36 similarly took place outside of the regular tourist season. That is usually when the weather is warmer. The camp at Perm-36 was actually part of a several-camp complex that included two other facilities. Initially part of the GULAG system, it was changed to a strict regime camp where prisoners engaged in logging and small manufacturing enterprises with the dismantling of the GULAG after Stalin’s death. Perm-36 is most famous for housing dissidents to the Soviet regime. I chose it as a memorial location for this study for several reasons. The first is that it was built during the Stalinist period, so it figures into the Stalinist repressions, although not the most intense period of repression under Stalin. The second is that Perm-36 is currently a museum to all political repression in Russia run by the Memorial

55 This prohibition was the result of an investigation into activities at the camp requested informally by the prominent Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, who visited the camp in 1936. Despite his concerns, he spoke and wrote glowingly about the redemptive nature of labor at the SLON in the Soviet press. The prohibition on executing prisoners was short-lived (see Brodsky 2002).
International human rights group. Lastly, I chose Perm-36 because it was the last camp of the GULAG system in operation.

Restoration of the camp and the memorialization of political repression there are the main projects of the Perm chapter of the Memorial organization. It sponsors an array of educational trips for Russian students in the summertime, teaching them about the perils of totalitarianism. There is even a website dedicated to the project. Improbably, it even offers an actual ‘camp’ where volunteers can come and help with various restoration projects.

Perm-36 is a work-in-progress. By Western standards, it is still in fairly rough shape. The concrete of the main building is weather worn and looks almost white as its ochre paint has chipped away over time. A sign in front of the camp, written in both Russian and English, informs visitors that this is the “Memorial Museum of Political Repression Perm-36, operational from 1946 to 1987.” Metal surfaces are rusty and in the case of the bars on the windows, often bent. Several of the fences that surrounded the original camp are missing, as are several turrets from which guards surveyed activity within the camp. But it is an impressive memorial site, and the only one of its kind in Russia. The buildings have all been mostly restored, and one can see where prisoners wrote letters, ate meals, and slept on wooden bunk beds that reminded me of the ones I had seen at Dachau. One could also see where prisoners sat in isolated punishment cells. The punishment cells, in particular, were grim. They are painted a bright blue and white, and have nothing of comfort whatsoever. There are round concrete cylinders that were the “chairs” in the cells. The table in each cell is essentially a concrete slab which has one of the cylinders as its base, and the windows were covered with an opaque paint. A very
bright light burned in each of the cells, and I was informed that the light stayed on at all times.

The restoration, however, lent an unrealistic quality to the displays—even though these were not mock-ups. For example, the paint in the punishments cells was obviously fairly fresh. There were no markings made by prisoners on the walls, nor were there any signs or anything that indicated that anyone had ever been there (prisoner or guard). The room that housed the bunk beds was similarly spotlessly clean, and the bunks were not made up. There were no personal effects of any kind in either room. Also conspicuously absent were any informational signs or plaques that explained what one was looking at.

Figure 7. Bunk beds on display at the Perm-36 camp. (Photo by author).
I was assigned a guide, who was probably just an intern who spoke a bit of English, to show me around the camp. My guide was apparently keen to practice his English and assiduously refused to speak Russian with me. This became irritating as we went on, because his English was clearly not up to the task of explaining the individual exhibits. So I would ask questions in Russian and he would answer me in pidgin English.

But it was informative and interesting. The camp itself was several acres. It had a main administrative building, which is where visitors come in, and where the current administrative offices are located. In a separate building, there is a special room set up for visitors. On the far wall as one comes in, there is a large, paneled door with a display showing portraits of famous characters involved in the history of political repression, including Stalin, Lenin, Molotov, and Dzerzhinsky, contrasted with scattering of portraits of better-known victims. The display is actually two doors, which open up to reveal an enormous flat-screen television, and there is a preliminary film for visitors to watch to get a bit of background on the camp prior to their tour. The film can be shown in Russian, English, French, or German, reflecting the fact that almost half of the visitors to Perm-36 are foreign tourists. The film is a well-produced chronicle of the camp and its history, as well as the camp’s restoration. It is about twenty minutes long, and afterwards, my guide took me on a tour of the facility. Several exhibits were closed, due to restoration, and none of the buildings were heated, because the camp operates mainly in the warmer months. But I was able to see the majority of the camp.

In one of the out buildings is a large room entirely dedicated to the museum’s restoration. Large photos of the camp in various stages of restoration are lined side-by-side along the length of the room. There are several featuring what look to be foreign
officials visiting the camp, and there are posed photographs of visiting tour groups, both apparently Russian and foreign.

Many of the displays have nothing to do with the camp itself, but are dedicated to the larger subject of political repression. There seems to be a tension about which function the museum should fulfill—should it be faithfully restored as testimony to the hard life of a political prisoner, or should it be a more modern museum portraying the repressive character of the entire Soviet system? The latter appears to be winning out as the function of the Perm-36 Center (see Sternthal 2012).

Figure 8. A modern exhibit at the Perm-36 museum. (Photo by author).
Throughout the camp, in all of the exhibits, there is no assignation of blame for the trials that individual prisoners endured there. The harsh reality of life in the camp is the one thing that is not very well portrayed at the Perm-36 museum. There are no weapons of any type displayed there. There is a single guard uniform and a single prison uniform. There are exhibits portraying the number of people imprisoned at various times and in different locations during the Soviet period, and there is an exhibit with poster-sized portraits of several prisoners who perished at Perm-36, such as the Nobel-nominated poet Vasily Stus. But there is no portrayal of the men who killed him. I came away from the experience of visiting the camp with the feeling that there should have been something more. I did not have the same feeling of horror that I had when leaving Dachau, or when visiting destroyed villages in Kosovo. The whole camp had an impersonal, sanitized feel to it. I came away feeling informed about the scope of political repression in the Soviet Union, but I felt no visceral reaction to the displays that were supposed to show how prisoners spent their time. Perhaps this is an element of the work in progress that is going on there, but this is only speculation, and it did not appear that much was being done on the interior of the museum. Workers who were present were engaged in fixing the exterior of one of the camp buildings in the compound.

Some of the objects I found conspicuous for the lack of them were actual materials from the inmates at either Solovki or Perm-36. There were no letters, diaries, scant photographs, or personal effects. There was no sort of evidence that would demonstrate that there had been victims at all in this place. This was perplexing to me throughout my travels in Russia. There seemed to be little physical evidence of the

---

56 The circumstances surrounding Stus’ death are still classified by the Russian government. All that has been reported is that he died in the camp infirmary after a stay in the punishment cells.
effects of political repression that would personalize it. Museums to the Great Patriotic War have voluminous quantities of personal effects, and actual materials from the war such as weapons, uniforms, and photographs. The Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow, for example, has over 110,000 such items. By contrast, in museums dedicated to political repression by far the most common materials were works of art by GULAG survivors. At the State Museum of the GULAG in Moscow, there was little in the way of personal effects, other than perhaps a pair of felt boots, a camp inmate’s uniform, and several spoons. The same was also true of Perm-36. The lack of these materials depersonalizes the experience these sites were meant to memorialize.

This was not the case, however, at Levashovo, a former secret NKVD burial site discovered by the Memorial organization and opened to the public in 1989. It receives nominal funding from the local and regional governments. There the effects of political repression were personalized in a very profound way through the establishment of makeshift grave markers placed by the families of victims buried there. This is an example of the phenomenon of “temporary memorials” as described in the literature (see Doss 2008; Kroslowitz 2007). These memorials “originate as performative gestures of audience engagement. People bring things to temporary memorials, not only making them but also orchestrating their affective conditions” (Doss 2008:38). The fact that people bring items to places such as Levashovo allows them to participate actively in memorialization which “substantiates a participant’s desire to engage in history and reinforces memory. Attaching memory to a keepsake connects individuals to specific moments in time and history” (Kroslowitz 2007:247).
As one walks through the opaque blue-green wooden fence surrounding the compound at Levashovo, the setting is pastoral, where one might agreeably take an evening stroll. But as one walks along the well-tended gravel pathway of the cemetery, past a wooden guard tower and into the grove of fir trees at the far end of the compound, the true character of the site is revealed. One begins to see colorful little plastic flowers laid out neatly in front of grave markers put there by the families of the 40,000 people who were shot or buried here by Stalin’s secret police, the NKVD, during the purge years of 1937-1938. Looking around, these grave markers are everywhere, seeming to spring up from among the trees naturally, like colorful mushrooms. They range from the simple, such as a ribbon affixed to a tree, to the elaborate, such as an ornately carved marble headstone complete with a likeness of the deceased. Kroslowitz (2007:247) observes that at sites such as this “[m]ourning traditions incorporate the use of tangible objects and personal mementos to ground a normally incomprehensible experience in reality.” Here
and there the personal grave markers are dotted with a national memorial to the victims of the terror from different countries. There are also more traditional fixed monuments to the Poles, Latvians, Belorussians, Italians, Jews, and so on, put there by the governments of the respective countries. There is even a memorial to the deaf and mute victims.

Figure 10. Varied memorials to victims of the Terror buried at Levashovo. (Photo by author).

The personalization of the victims at Levashovo is a powerful reminder of the grief and loss suffered by the families of the victims of political repression in the Soviet era. Levashovo, however, is an exception, and was the only memorial to political repression I visited that so starkly personalizes the phenomenon. More common are statues or sculptures depicting, usually in an abstract way, the terror and suffering of the victims. Etkind observes that “In contrast to the artistic experience of the Holocaust, on
the sites of the Gulag there are very few realistic monuments which depict an actual prisoner at a moment of suffering” (2009:194).

There is often a lack of contextual information at memorials to victims of political repression. Large stones from the Solovetsky Islands, home of the first GULAG camp, stand in squares in St. Petersburg and Moscow (in Troitsky and Lubyanka Squares, respectively), intended to act as memorials to victims. Monuments such as these, however, have almost no accompanying information. The Solovetsky stone in St. Petersburg, for example, has a verse carved into the base from Anna Akhmantova’s famous 1953 poem, “Requiem,” that reads: “I wish I could call them all by name.” The implication, of course, is that she is referring to the magnitude of victims of political terror which renders them faceless, but that is left to the individual observer to divine, and without some background knowledge of the context of Akhmantova’s words, this would seem rather vague. This is a problem common to memorials to the victims of political repression all over Russia. Most commonly, one merely sees the words “To the victims of political repression” and nothing else. Etkind (2004), while being shown a stone on a mass grave near Vologda, Russia, by his companion Lukichev recalls:

There, on a piece of granite, one can read: ‘To the memory of the victims of political repressions. We love. We remember. We mourn.’ ‘How do people understand what it is all about,’ I asked. ‘We know it from literature,’ said Lukichev, using a term even more ambiguous than ‘political repressions’ (37).

In choosing examples of two memorial sites to victims of political repression, I intentionally chose the sites of the first (Solovki) and the last (Perm-36) camps that made up the GULAG. In the former, I discovered that Solovki is more interesting to many Russians as a remote place to hike, camp, and fish, with some making a religious
pilgrimage to the monastery there. Not many people go there for its fearsome reputation
as the site and the first corrective labor camp in the Soviet Union. At Perm-36, I
discovered that one can indeed get an education about political repression from visiting,
but it is an abstract, informative education, not the sort of ‘experiential’ knowledge that
one might hope to attain having visited an actual GULAG. There is also the issue of who
is being educated—the extreme difficulty getting to the camp often means that foreign
tourists on package tours are a sizeable percentage of its visitors. I was told by my guide
that approximately 3000-5000 people visit the camp each year, almost half of whom are
foreigners. There is no printed guide or information about any of the exhibits or the
individual buildings, with the exception of the punishment barracks, outside of which is a
sign that reads (in Russian and English):

_Punishment Cell Block. Served as the prison inside the camp. Built in 1949. From
1946 to 1949 a wooden punishment cell block was on this site, but it was burnt
down by prisoners._

I asked myself, “Who wouldn’t want to hear more of that story?” But alas, nothing more
was forthcoming.

**Conclusion**

As noted previously in this chapter, the Great Patriotic War enjoys a vast
numerical superiority to the Stalinist Terror in the number of memorials dedicated to it.
Many of the actual sites where battles occurred during the war are remote, as are most of
the sites on which killings and incarceration occurred during the Terror. Memorials to the
war, however, are located in central squares and other prominent avenues where they are
sure to be seen (and are often impossible to avoid), while the much smaller number of
memorials to the Terror are located in out-of-the-way locations where one must make a
special effort to visit them.

Memorials to the war also differ in that they tend to have become more grounded
in Russian collective memory, because the political elite have provided a substantial
discursive frame of reference that may be accessed when viewing memorials to the war
(Gudkov 2005; Kucherenko 2011). This ‘script’ (van Dijk 2008; 1993) of the war
narrative allows memorials to the war to provide semiotic meaning without having to
explicitly spell out the significance of individual memorials. The ‘soft memory’ of texts
and other discursive mechanisms described by Etkind (2009; 2004) interacts with the
‘hard memory’ of the war memorials to provide them with context and meaning. There is
no such overarching narrative of the Terror to assist with placing memorials to it in
context (Etkind 2009; 2004). Moreover, the state actively obstructs the construction of
such a narrative. This is important because, as Paperno (2007) observes, there is still
“profound confusion” in Russian society about the “representations and interpretations”
of the Terror, despite the evidentiary “facts” of its occurrence (108). The lack of
accompanying explanatory information at memorials to the Terror is therefore more
significant, because one must rely on such information for context. The lack of context in
turn diminishes the extent of comprehension and reduces or obfuscates the significance
and symbolism of the memorial (Baddeley 2003; Etkind 2004; 2009).

The narrative of the war is also effectively personalized in almost all of the
museums and memorials dedicated to it. This occurs through the use of explanatory
information, photographs and other personal effects of the victims, and the realistic portrayal of heroes in statues, valorizing the sacrifices of both soldiers and civilians at these sites. By contrast, memorials to the Terror are often abstract, such as the sphinxes in St. Petersburg, described above, making it unclear what they are memorializing and what the representations symbolize. Also, as Etkind (2009) observed, memorials to the Terror do not portray victims realistically. Finally, Roginsky has noted that the memorials that do exist “immortalize the memory of victims. But there is no image of the crime, or of the criminals associated with this memory. There are victims—either of a natural disaster or of some other catastrophe, the sources and meaning of which remain incomprehensible to the popular consciousness” (2008; emphasis in the original).

The state’s unwillingness to fund memorials to the Stalinist Terror is consistent with the desire of the political elite to glorify the achievements of the Soviet state—not to document its darker pages. But memorials to the Terror exist, and a few of them are prominently located, such as the Solovetsky Stone in Lubyanka Square in Moscow. What explains this? As we have seen in this chapter, such memorials have come about almost exclusively through private funding. Grass-roots civil society groups in Russia are the agents responsible for securing funding for, and navigating the myriad hurdles that exist in attempting to memorialize a subject that the political elite would rather avoid. These organizations operate in opposition to the wishes of the political elite, and often in opposition to the wishes of a substantial portion of Russian society, which has come to view the Soviet state in positive terms. The positive discursive portrayal of the strong state, personified by the Soviet state and its victory in the Great Patriotic War, resonates with many Russians. This is consistent with the dominance of the war narrative, which
has come about owing to the greater access to discourse formulation and dissemination afforded to the political elite, especially as the Russian state has become more centralized and authoritarian. Yet civil society groups vie for access to this discourse, and continually make attempts to contest the representations of the past and their application to the present.
Chapter 5: Civil Society and Access to Discourse on the Soviet Period

The Kremlin and its spin doctors are to be congratulated on the ingenious way they have clogged the political arena with clones formed and financed by the Kremlin: parties, mushrooming youth movements, a public chamber, and a state council. These fronts create the illusion that there is an active political life and reduce opportunities for the emergence of vibrant social and political movements (Shevtsova 2007:270).

Introduction

One of the main components of the relationship between discourse and power is control over which individuals and groups have access to the formulation and dissemination of discourse. This means in some cases regulating which groups are allowed to speak on certain issues (see, for example, van Dijk 2008; 2006; Fairclough 1992a; 1989). In turn, this requires understanding the current configuration of what is called 'civil society' in Russia.

Scholars have charitably described Putin's formulation of civil society as a purposeful process designed to channel societal actors into endeavors that promote Russia's national interests (e.g. Henderson 2011; Hudson 2003). From the outset, however, this view fails to take into account that these 'national interests' are subjective, and determined by the political elite. Examples of successful democratic top-down civil society formation are few (Sa'adah 2006). Postwar Germany has been cited as an example of this type of development, where democratic institutions took root in society as a result of being consciously guided by state policies (e.g. Henderson 2011; Sa'adah 2006). But Sa'adah is quick to caution that the German civil society experience was the
result of previous experience with institution building in German society, coupled with what she calls "moral clarity" as a result of revelations about the Holocaust (2006:1). Importantly, Germany was also an occupied country at the time, and its political elite had little choice but to accede to the wishes of the occupying powers in determining the character of the nascent system. In Russia, previous experience with non-state institution building and the emphasis on democratic participation are both absent. The civil society arena is biased against actors that present narratives at odds with dominant elite interpretations, and these groups are subjected to regulation and restriction (Robertson 2009). Message-friendly groups, on the other hand, are provided enhanced discursive access, funding, and promotion by the state.

The Russian civil society sector is an example of the phenomenon I term 'preventive co-optation'. This type of co-optation occurs in circumstances where a) the inception of movements, institutions, or organizations that offer alternative narratives to the dominant state-sponsored discourse is obviated by controlling the environment where they might form, and b) the state's discursive dominance colors public perceptions of actors that challenge it, allowing the state to move against these actors with relative impunity. It is still possible for actors to exist outside of the state-created arenas, but such groups are often subjected to persecution by the state (Robertson 2009; Ledeneva 2006), and are portrayed as being puppets of the West or otherwise not supportive of Russia's interests (Mendelson and Gerber 2008).

Preventive co-optation, operating together with traditional forms of co-optation, such as the creation of pseudo-governmental and other proxy organizations in Russian society, create what I call 'complex co-optation'. This type of co-optation encompasses
both "symbolic power" (van Dijk 2008:), and the real physical dimension of power that may be employed by the state. As such, it explains recent overt methods of limiting discursive access by the state, as well as the subtler forms of discursive manipulation that are used to justify these methods.

Elite tolerance of groups that present narratives that challenge the dominant order appears to be waning, as evidenced by a raft of new legislative measures passed by the Duma in the summer of 2012, that have, among other things, recriminalized libel in the Russian Federation, limited the ability to stage protests or hold rallies, increased reporting requirements for registration of NGOs, and require NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as "foreign agents." These laws disproportionately affect human rights groups, who tend to be more prone to advancing discourse not in line with the expressed preferences of the political elite. This may be generally understood to be pro-democracy discourse or discourse that emphasizes negative aspects of the Soviet period, such as political repression. At the same time, organizations that emphasize positive aspects of the Soviet period have been granted such extensive access to discourse that they appear to be, and often function as, state entities. The manipulation and control of the civil society sector by the political elite in Russia is well-documented in the literature (e.g. Horvath 2011; Wilson 2010; March 2009; Richter 2009a; 2009b; Robertson 2009; Mendelson and Gerber 2008).

In this chapter I examine some of the changes that have occurred in the civil society sector since Vladimir Putin came to power as they relate to discursive access. I then compare two organizations whose experiences in Russia’s civil society have differed markedly, and demonstrate that this is at least partially a result of these groups’ vastly
different portrayals of the Soviet era. These differing portrayals affect how these groups are viewed by the political elite, and influence the extent to which these groups are subjected to state efforts that either limit or endorse their views. State treatment of the human rights group Memorial International is an example of the state limiting discursive access, while the youth activist group Nashi (Ours) is an example of a group receiving state endorsement and mutually-beneficial promotion. I briefly describe the history of these organizations, paying particular attention to their portrayal of the Soviet period in general and the Stalinist period in particular—especially the victory in the Great Patriotic War. I then examine the character of each organization’s relationship with the state. With respect to the latter, I include both the nature of the relationship, but also the extent to which these organizations have been able to participate in the current Russian variant of civil society (grazhdanskoye obshchestvo) that has come to be under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Finally, I chronicle these organizations’ respective experiences in terms of access to the discourse about the Soviet and especially Stalinist periods, and the extent to which they are able to either bolster or advance alternatives to the dominant narrative of the Stalinist period. First, however, it is instructive to understand the notion of civil society as it exists in Russia today and how it came to be this way.

‘Civil Society’ in Russia: The Specter of Revolution and Threats from Abroad

‘Civil society’, used here, refers to the context of a space between the state and the household where dynamic organizations of citizens form to advance common
interests (Dahl 1971). Mandel has noted, however, that what has occurred in Russia is “Putin’s appropriation of civil society” (Mandel 2012:230). That is, civil society does not consist of spontaneous interest group development, but of the state restricting and allowing which groups are able to participate in the civil society sector. This at odds with many scholarly conceptualizations of civil society, which proceed from the understanding that, "it is a requirement that the organizations and actors of civil society not be controlled by the institutions or actors of the state" (Zaida 2006:3556). Furthermore, the civil society that has come to exist in Russia operates in a fashion that Ledeneva characterizes as a kind of game—a system of “informal practices” that are the result of a society in which “formal rules and informal norms are not synchronized, and where the rules of the game are consequently incoherent” (2006:22). As will be discussed below, there are written rules, usually laws, regulations, or official requirements, and there are unwritten ones, which are essentially whatever the Kremlin deems appropriate. While Ledeneva focuses mainly on the political and business spheres of Russian society in her analysis, her concepts are applicable to the civil society sector as well. Because the civil society sector is similarly constricted with formal rules that disadvantage certain players, those players must learn to operate using informal systems.\textsuperscript{57} Ledeneva asserts that these practices are so common that everyone engages in them, albeit to varying extents (2006). The danger to players in this system is the selective enforcement of the formal or written rules, which often occurs when the informal ones are disregarded. Ledeneva explains, “The violation of unwritten rules can lead to the enforcement of written ones” (2006:13). Enforcement is determined by the political elite, and individuals and organizations that

\textsuperscript{57} These practices are noted elsewhere, as in Wedel’s (2005) concept of “flex-organizing,” where organizations navigate the formal systems in which they operate by using informal networks and allegiances outside of the established legal framework. See also Sakwa (2010).
do not conform to the informal practices that have been established by the elite as acceptable often find themselves facing substantial problems (Ledeneva 2006). As Russian journalist Masha Gessen describes it, in Putin's Russia "there can be no room for dissidents or even for independent actors ... independent actors are inconvenient in part because they refuse to accept the rules of the [Putin] mafia" (2012:260).

Control of the civil society sector by the political elite may seem to have little or nothing to do with the positive portrayal of the political centralization of Soviet and especially Stalinist era. As we have seen elsewhere in this study, however, the positive aspects of the centralized state are exemplified by victory in the Great Patriotic War, and this event plays an important role in the political uses of history by Kremlin elites. Russian scholars aver that the elites’ use of the war narrative performs “legitimizing functions” that serve to justify the new authoritarianism that is the hallmark of the Putin regime (Gudkov 2005:11). In particular, victory in the war is used to amplify feelings of nationalism, a by-product of which has been what Kucherenko calls a “constant search for enemies” (2011:2). This has been a theme repeatedly used by the political elite in their characterizations of Western-funded pro-democracy organizations as fomenting political opposition in Russia (Mendelson and Gerber 2008).

The reliance on the glory of the Soviet victory in the war has also had a chilling effect on the development of civil society in other, more fundamental ways. Gudkov notes that the war served to “sacralize” the “very principle of a ‘vertical’ construction of society, a mobilizational, command-hierarchical model of social order that does not

58 An example of this phenomenon in the business sphere is Mikhail Khodokovsky, who, like many of the so-called “oligarchs” in Russia, made his wealth by dubious means. Khodokovsky ultimately fell victim to accusations of financial crime (for which he was twice convicted) apparently due to his violation of Putin’s unwritten rule that the oligarchs stay out of Russian politics. See Hoffman (2003).
bestow any autonomy or value upon a private existence or group interests that are independent of the ‘whole’” (Gudkov 2005:11). This is also consistent with the constant presentation of pro-democracy and human rights groups in state-sponsored discourse as the “Other,” that are beholden to, or acting in the service of foreign governments determined to undermine Russia’s interests. This Other-presentation is also used to characterize the war experience as something uniquely Russian. As Kucherenko puts it, “For the majority of Russians, it was a war fought by ‘us’ (my) or ‘our lot’ (nashi) … It is this unity of purpose, a ‘patriotic consensus’ that many believe is lacking in modern-day Russia, something that needs to be recovered in order for the nation to regain its social identity and preserve its political integrity. In this respect, the War serves as a model for group solidarity and as a means of social control” (2011:2).

This is consistent with other areas of discursive manipulation by the political elite and has profound implications for the development of civil society. But it is important to understand the role that the war narrative plays as a tool of this manipulation, which is that it is the only achievement of the Soviet era around which Russians consistently rally. It is, therefore, of primary importance in discursive manipulation:

Today the memory of the war and victory is “switched on” mainly by mechanisms of the conservation of the social whole that prevent society from becoming more complex and functionally differentiated. Memories of the war are required above all to legitimate a centralized and repressive social order; they are built into a general post-totalitarian traditionalization of culture in a society that has not been able to cope with budding social change. This is why the Russian authorities constantly have to return to those traumatic circumstances of its past that reproduce key moments of national mobilization (Gudkov 2005:11).

The current version of Russian civil society is a managed affair, with pro-Kremlin elites preemptively co-opting potential opposition by determining which groups are
allowed to operate, how, and to what extent (Henderson 2011; Wilson 2010; Richter 2009a; 2009b; Robertson 2009; Evans 2008; Lamaître 2006). After the so-called “color revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan—and Russia’s own experience with surprising protests over changes to pension and benefit reforms in January 2005—the political elite became concerned about the possibility of a colored revolution in Russia (Wilson 2010; Horvath 2011; Robertson 2009). The elite began a multifaceted strategy designed to obviate such a possibility (Horvath 2011; Wilson 2010).

The first part of this strategy was reining in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were considered oppositional by the political elite. The opening salvo for this new policy was fired by Putin associate and Federal Security Service (FSB) head Nikolai Patrushev, who, in remarks before the lower house of parliament, accused foreign intelligence agencies of using Russian NGOs as a venue from which to weaken Russia’s security, and announced that new legislation on the conduct of NGOs was forthcoming (Horvath 2011). The promised legislation, Federal Law No.18-FZ, “On Introducing Amendments to Several Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation,” brought major changes to Russia’s heretofore chaotic, but largely autonomous, civil society sector (Horvath 2011; Robertson 2009). Some of the provisions in the new law have had positive effects—there were a substantial number of NGOs that “were either simply badly run or that were operated more as fronts for commercial or even criminal activity than as NGOs” (Robertson 2009:540). The new law eliminated these groups, and provides a potential mechanism for ensuring more effective and professional organizations in the Russian NGO sector.
The new legislation, however, also contained provisions that greatly restricted the ability of some NGOs to operate in Russia (Horvath 2011; Lamaître 2006). Among those organizations often targeted are various human rights organizations that have been vocal in their criticism of the Putin regime and especially Russia’s involvement in the breakaway republic of Chechnya (Richter 2009a). Foreign or foreign-funded organizations—usually those that work in the areas of democracy promotion and human rights—are required to register or re-register and the criteria for which their registration can be denied are vast (Mendelson and Gerber 2008; Robertson 2009). At one point, strictly foreign NGOs could be banned for posing a threat to Russian “sovereignty, political independence, national unity and uniqueness, and Russia’s cultural heritage and national interests” (quoted from Horvath 2011:18)—which would have left virtually all of these organizations vulnerable to investigation by state authorities—although that provision did not survive the law’s implementation.59

After the passage of the bill in 2006, conditions became more difficult for NGOs that received foreign funding. The new law created a new entity, the Federal Registration Service (FRS), which required all NGOs to register with it, and to submit sources of funding, as well as information about how those funds are distributed (Wilson 2010). The mandate of the FRS gave it “broad powers to investigate and ultimately close down” any NGO that was considered a threat to Russia’s national interests (Richter 2009b:10).

The political elite also attempted to undermine the significance of foreign funding to NGOs that worked within the parameters established by the new laws. The Russian government greatly increased the amount of funding available to Russian NGOs (Richter

59 The provision banning foreign-funded NGOs was dropped from the legislation after the Council of Europe warned that such a measure would violate Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of association. See Lemaître (2006).
According to Richter, the state became the “largest source of funding now available in the Russian Federation” (2009b:11). Scholars note, however, that the political objective to this erstwhile generosity is that this funding is a means of ensuring that the Kremlin is able to insert its own objectives into the platforms of the recipient organizations, lest they not receive funding (Richter 2009b; Wilson 2010).

Throughout the latter part of the 2000s, foreign-funded NGOs increasingly became the subject of critical media commentary by the political elite, including Putin himself (Horvath 2011). George Soros’ Open Society Institute, in particular, which funded pro-democracy elements in Georgia and Serbia, became a lightning rod for criticism by the political elite, while Soros himself became a symbol of the “insidious role of Western money in fomenting ‘velvet’ agitation” (Horvath 2011:4). The demonizing of Western funding sources continues to be the pattern in Russia. As Mendelson and Gerber observe, “Kremlin authorities and Putin himself repeatedly stir up anxiety among the population concerning dangerous foreign influences, suggesting that enemies encircle Russia and claiming that the foreign governments that help finance Russian nongovernmental organizations are meddling in Russia’s internal affairs” (2008:132).

Russia is certainly not alone in creating the specter of foreign threats to its well-being as a means of rallying support for its own political aims. Many states employ such techniques in order to bolster the political elite’s claims to legitimacy as defenders of the country against threats from without. But in Russia, the political elite go further than merely advancing the notion of an external Other that threatens Russia, they have created a structured discourse that systematically eliminates the opportunity for civil society to
advance alternative narratives, or to challenge the state-sponsored narrative. This ensures the continuity of power by those who wield it, to the detriment of the larger population that might benefit from the narratives and policies that might otherwise be advanced (van Dijk 2006a; 2008).

This is not to say that all foreign funded NGOs are anathema in Russia. As Sundstrom points out, NGOs that receive foreign funding but which work to advance what she calls “universally accepted” (which seems to indicate their lack of perceived political motivation rather than their universality) objectives—such as eliminating the brutal hazing of army conscripts in the Red Army—tend to encounter far fewer difficulties than those which work in the more controversial areas of democracy promotion and human rights, whose platforms are more likely to run afoul of the political elite (2005:420; see also Richter 2009a). This is especially the case as ‘democracy promotion’ has tended to be viewed by the political elite as fomenting revolution, and ‘human rights’ understood by the elite to be in the context of their violation by the Russian state.

A second component of the strategy to regulate civil society was the creation of an overarching state organization that would both advance the agendas of select NGOs and bring the entire sector under state regulation. The earliest manifestation of this was advanced early in the Putin years by Kremlin strategist Gleb Pavlovsky (Horvath 2011), who envisioned an organization that brought Russia’s civil society sector under a state umbrella organization to be called the Civic Forum. The Forum never materialized, following mixed feelings on the part of participants at the foundational meeting in 2001, and the perception that the state was more interested in controlling rather than assisting in
the development of civil society (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). The Kremlin elite, and Putin specifically, revived the idea in 2004, and the organization came into existence in 2005 as the Public Chamber (Evans 2008; see also Richter 2009a). Distrust of a state-organized civil society lingered among some groups, however, especially because, as Richter notes, members of the Public Chamber are “selected by a process dominated by the Presidential Administration” (Richter 2009a:40). 60 While human rights activists reluctantly agreed to participate in the 2001 Civic Forum conference, for example, not a single prominent human rights groups is represented in the Public Chamber, “as none of those organizations’ leaders sought to be included” (Evans 2008:346).

Human rights groups and other organizations whose platforms are nominally oppositional were still allowed to exist, however, and even to provide input to the Chamber. This is one of the unique characteristics of the Public Chamber. As Richter observes, it solicits input from society, and then directs critical or oppositionist input into channels where it will not “challenge the Kremlin’s leadership” (2009a:40). 61 This allows it to provide a controlled outlet for oppositional elements, while providing the perception that “the state listened to the voice of the people” (Richter 2009a:40). In this way, the state is able to defuse opposition while strengthening the state (Richter 2009a; 2009b).

60 In Richter’s analysis of the Public Chamber, he explains that, of the 126 members of the Chamber, “[t]he President selects the first tier of 42 members, and these appointees then select another 42 members from names submitted by social organizations working at the national level. These 84 members selected at the national level then select six members in each of the seven Federal Districts from regional social activists nominated by officials in oblast’ administrations” (2009a:51). He also notes that the Presidential Administration has a significant influence in determining a candidate’s suitability for membership in the Chamber (Richter 2009a).

61 The Russian political sphere contains similar entities, what March (2009) calls “parastatal parties,” that are supposed to be viable opposition parties, but which are in fact parties created by the Kremlin to provide the illusion of an atmosphere of political pluralism in which dissent is condoned by the state.
A third aspect of the Kremlin strategy was the mobilization of Russia’s youth. Youth political movements had played an important role in the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, and the political elite sought to counter nascent youth opposition groups such as Youth Yabloko (the youth wing of the liberal Yabloko party) and Oborona (Defense) in Russia (Schwirtz 2007). They did this by forming their own youth activist groups, or by supporting those with a pro-Kremlin and especially pro-Putin platform. Chief among these groups is the Nashi youth organization, which early on came to be groomed by prominent members of the pro-Kremlin political elite, such as Vladislav Surkov and Gleb Pavlovsky (Horvath 2011). Nashi members have also been granted extensive access to Vladimir Putin, both as President and Prime Minister (Atwal 2011; Topolova 2006; see also Hemment 2009). As we shall see, the Nashi organization is so closely associated with the Kremlin that it functions as a state organization, though it is nominally an NGO.

When Putin came to power, he immediately set about formulating an overarching youth policy (Blum 2006; see also Topolova 2006). He primarily charged the Ministry of Education with this task. This was followed by the creation of the State Commission for Youth Affairs, which was responsible for both coordinating policy directives from other agencies and with fielding proposals from other agencies with a mandate to address issues related to youth (Blum 2006). Lastly, Putin created an advisory board, the State Council, to oversee and regulate the activities of the above agencies, giving him a personal role in the development of Russian youth policy (Blum 2006).

---

62 Youth organizations were also brought under Kremlin supervision with the creation of a Youth Chamber in 2006 that sought to coordinate the activities of nominally independent, i.e. non-state, youth NGOs (Blum 2006).

63 For a different interpretation of the Nashi organization’s status, see Hemment (2012).
The key role played by the youth in the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and finally Ukraine, apparently convinced Putin and his elite that more active involvement was needed in addressing the status of Russia’s youth policy (Wilson 2010). The ruling party in the Russian parliament, United Russia, created a youth wing, known as Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard), whose primary purpose was to inoculate Russia’s youth against the oppositionist ideas that had fomented the colored revolutions elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet space (Schwirtz 2007).

Following mass protests in the wake of the contested 2011 parliamentary election results, and then the 2012 presidential election that returned Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency, a series of laws were passed by the Russian Duma that auger poorly for any development of the Russian civil society sector, and greatly restrict the ability of NGOs to operate. One of these new laws requires NGOs receiving foreign funding to register with the Ministry of Justice as “foreign agents,” and could eliminate many NGOs, because it spells out hefty fines for noncompliance, as well as prison time for the organizations’ leaders (Human Rights Watch 2012; Bridge 2012; Barry 2012).

Another law, signed by Putin in June 2012, imposes greatly increased fines “on people who organize or take part in unsanctioned demonstrations” (Herszenhorn 2012). This law was followed by the arrest of several prominent opposition figures, including the leader of several protests in 2011, Sergei Udaltsov, on charges of inciting unrest. The above is in addition to the widely publicized trial and conviction of several young members of the female punk rock band Pussy Riot for their videotaped protest inside

---

64 More troubling is the arrest of Leonid Razvozzhayev, who claims he was kidnapped by Russian special forces operators in Kiev, Ukraine, and tortured by interrogators into confessing. Razvozzhayev turned up in a Moscow prison days later, and Russian authorities produced a confession signed by him (Radia 2012).
Moscow’s Christ the Savior church. Another blow to the NGO community was the Russian government’s closing of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) offices throughout Russia. USAID had provided democracy promotion assistance through funding of Russian pro-democracy and human rights NGOs since the early 1990s.

Against this background I chronicle the experiences of two non-governmental organizations in Russia: Memorial International and the Nashi youth organization. My intent is to demonstrate both that the state controls public exposure to the discourse of certain groups, while encouraging and even facilitating the discursive access of others, but also that these discourses themselves—especially the portrayal of the Soviet period—affect the ways that the state interacts with these organizations. As mentioned previously, I compare these two organizations in the areas of how they portray the Soviet and Stalinist periods, the extent to which these portrayals are transmitted to society, and the nature of these organizations’ relationship to the state, including the extent to which they are integrated into the state’s concept of civil society.

**Memorial International**

*History of the Organization*

Founded during the Gorbachev era in the late 1980s, Memorial International is the oldest Russian human rights organization. In its heyday of the late 1980s and early 1990s,
Memorial’s membership included such human rights luminaries as dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov. The organization is credited with raising public awareness of Soviet human rights abuses, particularly those that occurred during Stalin’s rule, and with advancing the idea of constructing a national memorial for victims of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. The organization also assiduously collected information about victims of political repression, including recording oral histories of survivors. It was also active in the rehabilitation process of living and deceased victims of the GULAG, and lobbied for benefits for those who had been imprisoned (Smith 1996; Adler 1993; Kotkin 1992; see also White 1995).

Memorial was active in establishing memorial sites dedicated to victims of Stalinist repression, such as the Solovetsky Stone in Moscow’s Lubyanka Square, which had been brought from the Solovetsky labor camp (Forest, et al. 2004; Kotkin 1992). It also undertook the ambitious task of cataloguing each and every victim “of all the killing that had taken place under Soviet rule” (Merridale 2000:306). Partial lists were then published in so-called “Books of Memory,” which are still available to view at various museum sites throughout Russia. My repeated visits to the Memorial library in St. Petersburg reveal that they also printed and distributed more provocatively titled books, such as “List of the Shot.”

Despite the early successes of Memorial in establishing memorial sites and raising awareness of Soviet human rights abuses, particularly those that occurred under Stalin, the organization became mired in difficulties during the Yeltsin period. Smith (1996) explains the decrease in Memorial’s visibility as a combination of its more talented organizers seeking greener pastures in new political parties, and the confusing and
sudden proliferation of these parties in the newly open Russian political sphere. Memorial’s uniqueness blended into the swirl of new political entities, each seeking to advance its own agenda (Smith 1996).

A further contributing factor was the dramatic increase of life exigencies in a transitional society. Poverty, economic and political uncertainty, and a burgeoning organized crime problem all served to distract the Russian people from focusing on past human rights abuses (Merridale 2003). Scholars have noted the waning visibility of Memorial as part of a decline in “the general level of interest in history” in Russia (Merridale 2000:308; see also Merridale 2003; Forest et al. 2004).

Portrayal of the Soviet Period and Stalinism

Memorial’s founding mission was the preservation of the memory of those killed or imprisoned during the Soviet period. As a result, the organization’s portrayal of the Soviet period is overwhelmingly negative, with special emphasis on the Stalinist period due to the scope of the Terror and its high number of victims. The organization’s website is representative of the organization’s views on the Soviet past. The first paragraph of the organization’s history tab reads:

Through the extermination and the persecution of millions of people, the Soviet government attempted to conceal its crimes. Who knows exactly how many victims of terror there were? Where were the executed buried? Where were the countless camps and what transpired behind the barbed wire? Even the relatives of the deceased do not know the truth: “10 years with the right to correspondence”—this was the only information given about the fate of the convict under Stalinism, the short formula of his life and death (Memorial International 2012)
The content of the Memorial website is also instructive as to its characterization of the Soviet period. Its homepage features the Memorial logo in scratched-out lettering drawn above a stone from the first GULAG on Solovetsky Islands. The stone, drawn in light brown, is the only item pictured clearly. It sits in front of a log fence and a guard tower that are part of a labor camp. In the foreground in front of the stone, several wilted flowers lay on the ground. The picture evokes isolation and the fading away of memory. The haziness of the camp structures contrasts with the clarity of the stone, which has been the symbol of political repression used by Memorial at squares in Moscow and St. Petersburg. It is the organization’s choice of memorial for events that slip further and further away from memory with the passage of time, as those who lived through it die off.

The Memorial website goes on to explain the organization’s orientation and mission:

How can one find the truth in a world full of lies that obstruct our history? And is it worth trying? It is, after all, easy to live in a nice and simple world of illusions. The reality of history does not lend comfort, does not lead to success and prosperity, but rather complicates everything. It creates problems of guilt and responsibility, opens old wounds, and awakens shame where only pride should exist. Yet leaving behind the tragic truth means abandoning one’s own memory. A society without memory will obediently play into the hands of any demagogue; people in such a society are no better than nuts and bolts in the state machine. They are worthless slaves to an inhumane ideology that promises everyone happiness. However horrible the past may have been, forgetting it would make the future even worse (Memorial International 2012).

65 This was a common theme in my discussions with Memorial members and at Memorial-sponsored events I attended. There is an acute awareness that those people who actually experienced the Stalinist Terror are quickly vanishing. This makes the activity of memorializing paramount to the organization. One of Memorial's chief tasks in this area is the recording of oral histories from GULAG survivors, although the Memorial personnel I interviewed were not part of this aspect of the organization's activities.
Memorial representatives whom I interviewed repeatedly characterized the Soviet system in its entirety as “criminal,” with little respect for human rights or civil liberties. Moreover, they note that memorialization and remembrance of the Soviet system’s victims are deliberately downplayed or ignored by the state. During a meeting with Swedish high school students visiting the St. Petersburg office of Memorial, several students expressed incredulity that people did not openly criticize the evils of Stalinism and asked how that could be. The Memorial official responded that the state is seeking to glorify the Soviet past as part of its present, and it does this by assiduously refusing to create a national memorial to political repression, by not creating a repository of information about political repression, by keeping certain archives closed that might shed more light on the fate of individuals who perished, especially during the Stalinist Terror, and by controlling the content of history textbooks in schools to minimize the significance of the Terror. I came to recognize this as the official Memorial “line” on the current government with respect to Stalinism, and I heard almost the exact same list of issues from several different respondents who work for the organization. The Memorial position is telling, however, as it illuminates how its members perceive the current environment in Russia with respect to state treatment of the Soviet past.

Memorial has expanded its initial mandate substantially, to include projects on human rights violations in the Caucasus region, and immigration rights issues regarding ethnic minorities in Russia. Its activities in Chechnya, in particular, have been viewed very unfavorably by the Putin administration and the pro-Kremlin elite. But Memorial also continues to work in the area of Soviet-era human rights violations. While I was conducting my fieldwork in St. Petersburg in 2009, the organization sponsored and
promoted a play called “The Return,” about a GULAG survivor’s return from the camps and the difficulties he faced returning to society. Its website offers links to various Memorial activities in this area such as its “virtual GULAG” tour of museums and memorials dedicated to political repression, as well as to its vast archives, including lists of hundreds of thousands of people executed by Stalin’s NKVD.

*Relationship with the State*[^66]

In the Putin-Medvedev years, Memorial has had an increasingly difficult time bringing its message into mainstream Russian society. In 2001, Memorial, as a member of the informally organized *Narodnaya Assemblya* (People’s Assembly)—consisting of a handful of human rights organizations—was snubbed in the formative meeting of the Kremlin’s first attempt to bring all Russian NGOs under a Kremlin-designed umbrella organization. That organization was to be called the Civic Forum (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). The forum was to convene in November 2001 for the purpose of advancing a mutually beneficial dialogue between the civil society sector and the state. For their part, human rights organizations were highly critical of the proposed forum, believing it to be a mechanism for Kremlin control of Russia’s civil society sector.

Further, the prominent role accorded to supposed ‘NGOs’ that were in fact created by the Kremlin[^67] in advance of the proposed Civic Forum meeting seemed to

---

[^66]: The analysis of the Memorial organization’s relationship with the state necessarily involves an institutional analysis of the state’s efforts to control certain sectors of the civil society sector in Russia. These efforts to control civil society consisted of two key components: the creation of institutions that brought civil society organizations under state supervision, and legal measures that restricted the ability of NGOs to operate in Russia. As such, Memorial was not the only human rights group that was affected by the state’s policies, but I have tried to specify the impact to Memorial when possible, particularly as it relates to Memorial’s negative portrayals of the Soviet past.
bolster the accusations of the human rights organizations that the forum’s primary purpose was control, not dialogue. Nikitin and Buchanan sum up the atmosphere at the time: “Altogether, through the creation of pseudo-NGOs and the selective invitation of pro-Kremlin civic representatives for both the initial discussion and the proposed event itself, the administration’s strategy seemed to involve consolidation of a cadre of loyal NGOs that could ultimately outmaneuver more problematic opposition and activist groups on both the domestic and international scene” (2002:149).

Realizing that the absence of long-established and internationally prestigious NGOs was detrimental to the public perception of the forum, and had subjected it to increasingly negative publicity, the Putin administration abruptly changed tack. In the summer of 2001, then-Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Vladimir Surkov as acting plenipotentiary, along with other state representatives, met with representatives of several NGOs at the Moscow office of Memorial (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). The meeting involved mostly an airing of grievances that the NGO representatives had with the proposed construct of the forum, and they insisted on several fundamental changes that were designed to make the forum more of an idea-sharing assembly, as opposed to a strictly organizational meeting with more plenary functions than discussion of serious issues.

In order to achieve this, representatives at the Moscow meeting also insisted that a wider swath of NGOs be represented at the forum, including many that were not initially invited, especially human rights and environmentalist NGOs. They also demanded

---

Nikitin and Buchanan note that, “One such organization, named, with no small irony, Grazhdanskoje Obshchestvo (Civil Society), diligently undertook the task of helping to select Civic Forum participants from across Russia” (2002:149).
substantial organizational changes, such as having the original Organizing Committee membership compose only a third of the new committee, with the other thirds going to representatives of the heretofore uninvited NGOs, and the Presidential Administration, respectively (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). The Putin administration accepted the proposed changes, as it was by now late to modify the forum or cancel it altogether. By the time of the second meeting in early fall of 2001, the organizing committee now had among its members the chair of the prestigious Moscow-Helsinki Group, and the co-director of Memorial, Semyon Roginsky, as well as other prominent human rights activists. Nikitin and Buchanan note that “Many saw the redesign of the forum structure and planning as a victory in itself for civil society insofar as NGO leaders boldly reshaped the project to provide for more equality and civic leadership” (2002:150).

The conference was initially viewed by many participants as an auspicious opportunity to air their views to high-level government officials, including Putin himself, who attended the opening ceremonies (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). This mood began to sour, however, when Putin excused himself after his own speech and the short remarks of several government representatives, and took most of his entourage of officials with him: “These actions very much gave the impression that not only was the forum not a priority for the president, but that those surrounding Putin arranged the schedule so that he would remain insulated from information or situations that might have proved unpleasant for him” (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002:157).
At the closing session of the conference, former naval captain Grigory Pasko spoke at the closing session of the need for independent media and a free exchange of information—to the applause of everyone in the hall, including then Prime Minister Kasyanov. Several weeks later, Pasko was convicted of treason and sentenced to four years in a strict-regime prison (Nikitin and Buchanan 2002). The most perhaps the most detrimental blow to the high hopes that the conference had evinced among human rights groups. One Memorial member to whom I spoke said that this event heralded the end of the organization’s attempt at cooperation with the state on the development of any ‘official’ version of civil society.

This independence comes at a cost. In interviews with Memorial members, it quickly became apparent that the organization is highly marginalized in Russia today. While Memorial enjoys tremendous prestige among Western scholars (see, for example, Applebaum 2003; Adler 1993; 2005; Merridale 2000; 2003; Smith 1996; 2002), and among Russians who were imprisoned in Soviet camps (Figes 2007), it is increasingly unknown to the larger Russian population. This is especially true among the youth: A survey of Russians aged 16 to 29 conducted by Mendelson and Gerber in 2007 showed that only 17 percent “had even heard of” Memorial (2008:143).

Memorial representatives told me that the organization has focused its efforts on the areas where it has had the greatest degree of success, such as local and sometimes regional levels. For example, the St. Petersburg branch of Memorial had recently been successful in lobbying the city government to make an area where thousands of Soviet citizens were shot by the Cheka during Lenin’s Red Terror an official site of memory.

68 At the time, Pasko was under indictment for treason after he distributed video footage of the Russian navy dumping radioactive material into the Sea of Japan to a Norwegian environmentalist group. See Eberhard (2008:59).
Such successes are rare, however. As a political science professor familiar with the organization said to me, “Memorial is kept very far away from [the state’s] decision-making processes.”

Memorial was subject to the onerous restrictions imposed by the 2006 federal law on NGOs operating in Russia mentioned earlier, as it receives a substantial amount of its funding from foreign sources. The Memorial website lists George Soros as a key source of funding, which immediately makes the organization subject to state suspicion. In addition to these difficulties, Memorial has been subjected to the Brezhnev-era-style tactics of intimidation and repression against opposition groups, described by scholars such as Robertson (2008). On 4 December 2008, the St. Petersburg Memorial office was raided by federal authorities, who confiscated materials related to Memorial’s ‘virtual GULAG’ project.69

Memorial’s estrangement from the federal government changed abruptly in the late fall of 2009. At that time, President Medvedev convened a working group called “On the Perpetuation of the Memory of the Victims of the Totalitarian Regime and On National Reconciliation.” The purpose of this group was to examine the possibility of a campaign to make good on his words of 30 October weeks earlier, that “The memory of victims of political repression should be as important as the memory of victory in the Great Patriotic War” (Medvedev 2009). Medvedev gave his imprimatur for state involvement by appointing noted political scientist and Putin advisor Sergei Karaganov, head of the group. To the surprise of many in the Russian human rights community, Medvedev also enlisted the head of Memorial, Arseny Roginsky, in the task of formulating exactly what such a campaign might consist of. Seizing an opportunity to

---

69 After a short court battle, the materials were returned to the Memorial organization.
advance several of its long-sought-after objectives, Memorial provided a list of measures
that it sought to have included. Among the more provocative were the notions of labeling
the entire Soviet period criminal, and a thorough accounting of Stalin-era victims of
repression, by opening the archives of the security services.

On the face of it, this seemed like a sea change in Kremlin policy. Memorial
officials to whom I spoke in early fall of 2009 had exhibited a ‘wait-and-see’ approach to
Medvedev’s words of 30 October, as the president had often been accused of not
following word with deed in his public pronouncements. Here seemed to be the proof that
this was changing.

As of early 2012, the working group is still convened. It is unclear whether this is
an attempt by Kremlin authorities to demonize the Memorial organization, to channel the
energies of Memorial into a project whose viability even its authors seem to doubt (see
Buckley 2011), or if it is a legitimate proposal for meaningful change in the state role in
publicizing the more odious aspects of the Soviet past. If it is indeed the latter, then
certainly the timing is strange—Stalin is currently a very popular figure in Russia, and
the Soviet period is a popular source of nostalgia and, for the younger generation, an
idealized model of what the Russian state should be (Sherlock 2007a). Further, any
publicly critical assessment of the Soviet period would be completely at odds with the
positive portrayal that the Kremlin has carefully constructed. For the moment, the project
has had deleterious consequences for the Memorial organization, as it is unpopular with
the vast majority of Russians (according to a 2011 poll, 90 percent oppose the
campaign) \(^{70}\), and it has led to a barrage of threats and negative publicity aimed at the organization (Buckley 2011).

With the return of Putin to the presidency in 2012, the situation for Memorial and other human rights organizations in Russia has become much more perilous after a new series of laws were passed by the Duma in the summer of 2012. In particular, a law requiring foreign-funded NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice as “foreign agents” has placed these organizations in jeopardy, as noncompliance may be penalized by prison time for the organization’s leaders, and closure of its operations altogether in the event of repeated failures to register. Memorial representative Oleg Orlov has said that his organization will refuse to abide by the law’s provisions (Bridge 2012). In early 2013, offices of Memorial and dozens of other human rights organizations throughout Russia were raided, apparently in searches for evidence of noncompliance with the foreign agents law.

The *Nashi* Youth Movement

*History of the Organization*

The *Nashi* organization was created in April 2005, as a reincarnation of the youth group *Idushchiye Vmestye* (Walking Together), founded by Vasily and Boris

\(^{70}\) As reported by Rosbalt.ru. See “Rossiya skazala ‘nyet’ destalinizatsii” (Russia says ‘no’ to de-Stalinization) at www.rosbalt.ru/main/2011/05/06/846408.html. Accessed November 6, 2011.
Yakemenko,\textsuperscript{71} two brothers with a fanatical devotion to Vladimir Putin (Robertson 2009). The organization was formed with the intent of supporting Putin’s policies through rallies and the distribution of pro-Putin literature. \textit{Idushchiye Vmestye} had seen rapid growth through the years 2000-2003, and the organization soon came to the attention of Kremlin elites, particularly Vladislav Surkov (Topolova 2006). Following the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the successful founding of opposition youth groups such as Youth Yabloko (the youth wing of the Yabloko political party), Surkov and Vasily Yakemenko “sought to develop a more aggressive organization with a greater focus on ideology, identity-formation, and the conflation of self-interest and ideology” (Robertson 2009:543). These, in addition to a fierce devotion to Putin and his policies, were the founding principles of the \textit{Nashi} youth movement. The group’s first public appearance, in May 2005, when more than 50,000 youths from several \textit{Nashi} chapters participated in festivities marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, “created a media frenzy” and thrust the group into the national spotlight (Hemment 2009:44).

The \textit{Nashi} organization has a multi-faceted relationship with the political elite in Russia. The group’s overarching characteristic is its pro-Putin orientation, with its positive portrayal of the Soviet period a close second. This is not inconsistent—Putin has publicly aired his positive view of the Soviet Union (Sherlock 2007a). The pro-Putin stance of the \textit{Nashi} organization appealed to the political elite because it was viewed as providing a bulwark to opposition youth activist movements. But \textit{Nashi} also fulfills different needs of the state as they arise, from mitigating the effects of unpopular polices

\textsuperscript{71} In 2008, Vasily Yakemenko, the leader of \textit{Nashi}, relinquished his position in order to become head of the State Committee for Youth Affairs (see Atwal 2009).
to staging political rallies in support of Putin, to coercing opposition activists. The status of the *Nashi* organization as an independent, i.e. non-state entity is also attractive to the political elite because it allows *Nashi* to engage in semi-legal or illegal behavior that is advantageous to the elite, while allowing them to deny that they have any control over *Nashi* activities.

*Portrayal of the Soviet Period and Stalinism*

The *Nashi* organization, known more formally as the Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement (*Molodezhnoye demokraticheskoye antifashistskoye dvizheniye*), portrays the Soviet period generally as an era of Russian greatness. Regarding the Stalin period, the organization’s focus is unambiguously on the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War. The *Nashi* website provides several links to various projects associated with the war, and it is mentioned several times on the page one accesses to join *Nashi* ([www.nashi.su/join](http://www.nashi.su/join)), although there is no mention of Stalin by name.

The *Nashi* organization model mirrors Soviet youth organizations. Its members dress in the red and white colors of the Soviet Pioneers, and use language of the Soviet Komsomol youth organization. While the anti-revolution mission of the organization is primary, it also engages in social service activities (Atwal 2009), just as the Komsomol and other Soviet youth organizations did (Hemment 2009). But *Nashi* service projects “are not directed at the needy, but mostly address a distinct sector of the population: World War II veterans” (Hemment 2009:44). Victory in the war is inspirational for *Nashi* activists, although it is part of a generally positive portrayal of the Soviet period.
Many of [the Nashi group’s] campaigns have a strong nationalist-patriotic element, and many involve honoring Soviet history, specifically the Great Patriotic War… More broadly, Nashi honors the Soviet period via its educational and ideological activities. At Nashi summer camps at Lake Seliger, youth attend lectures on Russian history given by nationalist scholars and publicists. They are encouraged to draw inspiration from and model themselves on their grandparents, the heroic generation that saved Europe from fascism, in contrast to the ‘defeatist’ Gorbachev generation that presided over the Soviet Union’s demise (Hemment 2009:46)

The sanctity of the war to the Nashi group is demonstrated in other ways, as well. In 2009, journalist and human rights advocate Aleksandr Podrabinek went into hiding after receiving threats and finding members of the Nashi organization camp outside his apartment block in Moscow (Freedom House 2010). This was “in retaliation for an online article [Podrabinek wrote] criticizing veterans for ignoring Soviet crimes committed during World War II” (Freedom House 2010).

There are other aspects of the Nashi organization that indicate its pro-Soviet orientation. For one, the Nashi website is registered under the domain of the Soviet Union, with its universal resource locator (URL) ending in “su” as opposed to the “ru” of the Russian Federation (i.e. www.nashi.su). The organization’s homepage is dramatic in its use of the color red, another Soviet allusion, and features links to projects such as “Eternal Memory,” which asks young people to conduct interviews on video with veterans of the Great Patriotic war in an effort to combat “authors who publish lies” and misinformation about the heroic nature of the war (see Nashi 2012).

Another characteristic of the organization is its use of Soviet-era language. For example, senior Nashi members refer to themselves as “kommissars,” and “they use the language of the Komsomol. Nashi activists interviewed during [fieldwork] use the terms sotsialki (socials) and subbotnik (sabbath) to describe their work and eschewed other
proffered terms, such as *blagotvoritelnost* (charity)” (Hemment 2009:44). The use of such terminology, especially the Soviet-era terms for (usually mandatory) youth service obligations resonates with elderly Russians nostalgic for a more stable Soviet past.

*Nashi* maintains close ties to the Kremlin. In addition to funding it receives from the state, the organization’s ideology mirrors that of the Russian elites’ which depicts the current situation in Russia as one “where Russia is under siege from a rapacious west in a hostile world system” (Hemment 2012:249). The Great Patriotic War is often invoked in these depictions (Hemment 2012). *Nashi* activists often provide help to the state, such as providing counter-demonstrations to the opposition protests following the parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2011 and early 2012.

The *Nashi* use of Soviet imagery and style, including language, focuses solely on positive aspects of the Soviet period. Not once is anything negative about the Soviet Union mentioned in its manifesto or on its webpage (aside from lamenting that it came to an end). The positive portrayal of the Soviet period and the organization’s stated purpose as a bulwark against the possibility of colored revolution in Russia help to explain the positive relationship that *Nashi* has with the pro-Kremlin political elite.

**Relationship with the State**

The pro-Kremlin ideology of the *Nashi* organization, and its cozy relationship with the Kremlin have apparently rendered it immune to restrictions placed on the NGO sector by the state. *Nashi* is not subject to the provisions of the 2012 ‘foreign agent’ legislation for the simple reason that the organization is not funded by foreign donors.
But no one from the Nashi organization has been arrested for the counter-demonstrations to opposition rallies that occurred in late 2011 and early 2012, following the parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively, while several of the opposition leaders have been arrested and charged with inciting mass unrest (Radia 2012).

The Nashi organization also contains subgroups that operate using a pro-Putin orientation that skirts the boundaries of legality. For example, a subgroup known as Nashi Vyborg (Our Elections), expended substantial effort during the 2007/2008 elections both getting out the youth vote and “maintaining a visible presence on the streets ahead of the election to physically intimidate the opposition” (Atwal 2011:136). Another Nashi subgroup, the Dobrovolnaya Molodezhnaya Druzhba (Volunteer Youth Service), allegedly made up of recruited soccer hooligans, has “acted as a security service or militia for the movement, policing Nashi rallies and demonstrations as well as harassing members of the opposition” (Atwal 2012:136). Atwal (2011) notes that these tactics are only acceptable because of the Nashi organization’s status as an independent, i.e. non-state actor. She notes that other organizations’ status as youth branches of established political parties—such as Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard), which is a youth wing of the United Russia political party—forces them to abide by “many of the constraints and rules of decorum of the formal political arena” (Atwal 2011:221). Another attractive aspect of the Nashi organization to the political elite is the fact that, because Nashi is not part of any political party, it allows the political elite plausible deniability of its intimidating tactics, even as the elite benefit from such conduct. As Atwal puts it: “It could be argued that it suited the Kremlin for Nashi to act in a more intolerant and
aggressive way than the Young Guard for fear of tainting United Russia in the process of seeking to eliminate opposition to the regime” (2011:221).

The relationship between Nashi and the Kremlin is so well known that it has become common knowledge in Russian business circles (Atwal 2009). This has meant that contributing to the organization has become one of the Kremlin’s ‘unwritten rules’ discussed by Ledeneva (2006). Businesses contribute to the organization lest they be tarred as unpatriotic (Atwal 2009; Robertson 2009). The close relationship to the state is also demonstrated by the fact that several Nashi komissars have gone on to positions in the Public Chamber (Atwal 2009).

There are other aspects of the Nashi organization that explain its close association with Kremlin elites. Hemment (2011), for example, argues that the Nashi movement has been employed as a stop-gap measure by the Kremlin in a positive way to compensate for administrative missteps by the Kremlin that deleteriously affected segments of the population (see also Robertson 2009). An example was the 2005 implementation of Law 122, which “sought to bring an end to the Soviet-era in kind benefits (such as free or subsidized public transportation) with fixed cash payments” for certain populations, especially veterans of the Great Patriotic War, students, and the disabled (Hemment 2009:40). She argues that Nashi was employed as a combination youth volunteer, neoliberal social-service measure to assuage the difficulties of these groups, although she also notes the primacy of Nashi’s anti-revolutionary ideology. She also explains that the Nashi group provided a nostalgic emotional boost to the veterans and pensioners with whom they dealt, especially as Nashi members style themselves in the vein of Communist-era youth organizations such as the Pioneers. But while Hemment portrays
Nashi activists as coming to the rescue of these disadvantaged segments of the population, Hemment herself acknowledges that this assistance often consisted more of show than substance, i.e. as public relations opportunities rather than actual assistance (see 2009:).

Nashi appears to fulfill myriad roles in Russian society, depending on the particular circumstances and what the Kremlin requires of it, but it is clear that the organization’s defining characteristic is that it is staunchly pro-Putin (Hemment 2009), and this defines what it perceives to be its mission at any given point in time (Atwal 2009). Whether Nashi members act in support—or ease the consequences—of current Kremlin policy, provide counter-demonstrations to opposition groups, or rally nationalist sentiment, there appears to be active direction from the Kremlin reflected in its activities. Putin has met repeatedly (and very publicly) with members of the Nashi group (see, for example, Hemment 2009), including at his private residence in Zavidovo (Atwal 2009).

Indeed, much of the Kremlin sponsorship that Nashi receives appears to be due to the group’s ability to provide a positive public relations angle to scheduled events (Hemment 2009). For example, the ceremony during which Medvedev was sworn in as President of the Russian Federation in 2008 was carefully choreographed with surging throngs of enthusiastic Nashi members in attendance, cheering and waving the Russian tricolor flag. Similarly, Nashi members have been enlisted to fill crowds at other

---

72 Atwal (2011) has suggested of the relationship that “Although the state cannot dictate Nashi or the Young Guard’s behavior ... the Kremlin is ultimately able to ensure that Nashi and the Young Guard’s behavior meets with its approval under threat of withdrawing its support for the youth movements and curtailing their activities. This is a powerful incentive for Nashi and the Young Guard to adhere to the Kremlin’s wishes and to try to favourably influence the Kremlin’s attitude towards them as they see fit” (242-243).
Kremlin-sponsored events, and to provide counter-demonstrations to opposition ones when they occur.

The Nashi group has also been employed to artificially inflate nationalist protests when the political elite deemed that not enough legitimate protest activity was occurring. For example, in 2006, the Estonian government voted to relocate a prominent Soviet war memorial in the capital city of Tallinn, at which point “Nashi activists picketed the Estonian embassy and mobbed the Estonian ambassador to Russia, Marina Kaljurand, to the point that she fled the country and left her post as ambassador” (Atwal 2009; see also Lehti, et al. 2008). A similar fate befell British ambassador Anthony Brenton after he spoke at an opposition conference in 2006 (Atwal 2009).

Conclusion

Memorial International has a long history of not playing by the unwritten rules discussed by Ledeneva (2006). Primarily, the organization has acted in opposition to not only state policy in the Caucasus region, but more fundamentally to the resumption of authoritarianism in the country and the assiduous downplaying of negative aspects of the Soviet period by the Kremlin. Publicizing the latter of these is after all Memorial’s founding mission. This uncompromising stance has contributed to Memorial’s marginalized status in Russian society, and is likely a causal factor in its lack of opportunities to disseminate its alternative to state-sponsored narratives of the Soviet
period. Memorial openly challenges the Kremlin strong-state discourse and views it as pernicious.

By contrast, Nashi does play by the Kremlin’s unwritten rules. This allows it to have a much closer relationship with the state. It also helps to explain why the group has been granted such extensive access to the tools of discourse formulation, especially the media. Nashi has also been used by the state as a tool of discourse dissemination, especially of the merits of a strong centralized state, which would also help to explain the state patronage it receives.

Both of these organizations advance portrayals of the Soviet system, albeit in vastly different ways. Memorial focuses on the repressive character of the Soviet state, while Nashi employs positive imagery of the Soviet Union (despite the fact that most of its members are not old enough to have experienced the real thing). Memorial’s membership has been in decline for quite some time now, as many of its members are of advanced age; people who were themselves GULAG inmates, or who had loved ones victimized by the Soviet state.

Even the names of these respective organizations have a symbolism to them. “Memorial,” symbolizes holding onto—and perpetuating the memory of—a part of the Soviet historical experience that many nostalgic Russians would like to forget. By contrast, the term “Nashi” invokes imagery of the Great Patriotic War, and has a colloquial meaning of “ethnic Russian.” When I visited the Church of the Spilled Blood in St. Petersburg with a Russian friend, for example, my friend purchased our tickets, allowing me to avoid the higher price charged to foreigners. But when we walked into the church, one of the women on duty immediately stood up from her stool and walked
straight over to me. The woman asked to see my ticket, and when my friend (who had been putting her coat up) came over, the woman said sweetly, “He seems a nice young man, but he isn’t ours now, is he dear?” I had to go back and purchase another ticket. In this sense, the Nashi have appropriated a term that has immediate symbolism to Russians, regardless of whether they know anything about the organization and its activities.

For the Memorial organization, keeping the memory of unpleasant aspects of the Soviet period alive is increasingly difficult in Putin’s Russia, where the strong state is glorified and the example of victory in the Great Patriotic War is held aloft as the example of the Russian state at its best. While the Great Patriotic War is also presented to the Nashi as a paradigmatic example of what the state can achieve, the imagery that Nashi uses is based more on the ideals of the Soviet youth movements of the Komsomol (youth communist league) or the Pioneers. Patriotism and service are the principles that are directed at the Nashi youth by speakers who come to their summer camps and lecture them. But the manifestation of the Nashi variant of patriotism has frequently been the aggressive intimidation of opposition groups and those who support them (Atwal 2011). Nashi has come under the influence of the state-sponsored characterization of Russia as surrounded by foreign enemies who are intent on her destruction. Victory in the Patriotic War is perhaps unique among Russian historical experiences because the narrative of it is used as the justification for xenophobic views and as the unifying event for the Russian people.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In order for there to be any sense in asking oneself about the terrible price to pay, in order to watch over the future, everything would have to be begun again. But in memory, this time, of that impure ... “history of ghosts.” (Derrida 1994:175)

The Contribution of This Study

Co-optation by the state is a current that runs throughout the entirety of this study. Theoretically, this study advances the concepts of 'preventive co-optation' and 'complex co-optation'. The former occurs via two complementary phenomena. The first is the creation by the political elite of structural environments (e.g. the Public Chamber) for participation in the civil society sector that allow them to control civil it and preempt the emergence of new oppositional actors. The second is that the state co-opts both nostalgia for the Soviet period and the narrative of the Great Patriotic War. By appropriating and re-interpreting the symbols and language in these discourses, they promote positive portrayals of the Soviet period with a focus on the Stalin era that amplifies and valorizes its achievements (Gudkov 2005). The effect of this is to stigmatize the presentation of alternative narratives (Fofanova and Morozov 2009). This allows the state to harass or eliminate opposition groups that promote these views without fear of provoking social unrest or political challenges. This allows one to reconcile seemingly contradictory poll results showing, for example, that at the end of October 2012, almost a quarter (23%) of Russians believe that a wave of new political repression is sure to come (Interfax 2012),
while at the same time another poll finds that two-thirds of Russians approve of Putin’s leadership (Levinson 2012).

At the same time, extant organizations become aware of elite preferences and "respond to the stronger and more politically powerful elements of their surroundings," shaping their own agendas to conform with these (O'Toole and Meier 2004:681). The elite take pains to make their discursive preferences known through informal norms in society to which actors must adhere (Ledeneva 2006). For example, Putin made clear early on that privileging pro-Soviet narratives was part of his political platform (Sherlock 2007a).

Complex co-optation occurs when preventive co-optation combines with more traditional forms of co-optation, i.e. where the mission or orientation of challenging groups is altered with the introduction of new elements (e.g. Gaventa 1980; Gramsci 1971; Selznick 1949), such as state control over the media, education, and the process of memorialization in Russia. These concepts advance a comprehensive portrait of state manipulation, and explain why the state's discursive preferences are able to so thoroughly permeate Russian society. The comprehensive nature of state discourse control is exemplified by the education sphere. The Russian Ministry of Education and Science has not only co-opted and reinterpreted historical discourse in educational materials such as textbooks, it controls the vetting process by which textbooks may be considered for use in Russian schools. Textbooks that offer portrayals or characterizations of historical events that do not align with elite preferences are simply not approved. This eliminates the presentation of alternative narratives by not making them available to students and teachers. Further, the state controls the amount of classroom time devoted to particular
topics, which has meant that the state is able to emphasize certain aspects of history over others. It also makes textbooks that convey state-sponsored discourse freely available to often cash-starved schools that sometimes have little choice but to accept them. Finally, the state has created a nationwide examination that privileges textbooks containing the elite-sponsored discourse.

This study advances an understanding of contemporary perceptions of Stalin as they exist in Russia today, and explains why there is such an attraction to him, despite revelations about the crimes he committed against his people. The political elite use Stalin as a symbol of the entire Soviet period, emphasizing narratives of that period that glorify the achievements of the Stalin era. By co-opting multiple avenues of discourse formulation, they are able to minimize phenomena inconvenient to the dominant narrative in collective memory, such as political repression and violence. The political elites’ emphasis on the positive aspects of the Stalinist period allow them to continue the regime’s authoritarian practices and to justify them, providing legitimacy to Putin’s own centralizing of the “power vertical.” Within this, the Putin elite imply continuity with a tradition of harsh rulers in Russia, of which Stalin was one.

The focus on historical discourse as a tool used by the authoritarian Putin regime is an underutilized approach to understanding the Russian case. This study demonstrates the extent to which collective memory can effectively be created or manipulated by the state in an authoritarian society. This is perhaps the novelty of the Russian case: It is an example of state manipulation and distortion of preexisting tendencies toward particular configurations of memory—i.e. positive memories of the Soviet experience for those old enough to recall it, and longing for a mythologized version by the young—in Russian
society that were created by a unique set of social, economic, and political circumstances.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the study’s findings.

**Implications of This Study**

All states seek to emphasize the positive aspects of their histories and to minimize unpleasant aspects of those histories. Positive historic narratives foster national pride, and provide collective memories that unify citizens in a common shared history. For this reason, “their deliberate manufacture and manipulation, in order to promote national and group solidarity, or the authority of rulers and political institutions, has long been a salient feature of organized politics” (Sherlock 2007a:5). The unifying event for the Russian people is victory in the Great Patriotic War, which is used by the political elite as an anchor for national identity in a country that struggled to find an identity in the post-Soviet period (Fofanova and Morozov 2009; Morozov 2008; Roginsky 2008). The political repression that preceded, accompanied, and followed victory in the war, however, is minimized as unfortunate but justifiable, given the needs of the war and its aftermath (Fillipov 2007). If the discourse of the Stalinist period ended there, remaining as part of a discussion of a past history with little relevance to the present except as a rally point for the Russian people, the situation there might be different, with alternative narratives eventually gaining an audience.

The discourse on the Stalinist period does not end there, however. Under the stewardship of the political elite under Putin, it goes further. Using the victory in the Patriotic War to legitimate Stalin’s totalitarian state, the political elite use the symbolic
capital of Stalin to condone and encourage nostalgia for the Soviet era. This involves glorifying the achievements of a strong centralized state, while suppressing or eliminating opposition to it. In this way, the positive portrayal of the Stalinist period by the elite has laid a discursive foundation that glorifies the strong, centralized state, implicitly justifying the authoritarianism of the Putin regime. The Stalinist period has become part of a useable past in the Russian present.

The elite’s control over the discourse of the Stalinist period has several important implications for the future of Russia’s political landscape. The first is that the current glorification of the strong state is unlikely to change without some fundamental alteration to the discourse of the Stalinist past. This necessarily involves addressing the nostalgia for the Soviet period of which Stalin is symbolic. The second is that the methods that the political elite use to promulgate its strong state discourse, and to control alternatives to it, have domestic and foreign policy consequences for Russia’s future. These methods include portraying the chaotic Yeltsin years as an example of ‘democracy’ in Russia, and casting all opposition political and civil society groups—even if they are pro-democracy—as foreign-directed threats to Russia’s interests. Lastly, I argue that the lack of serious transitional justice mechanisms in Russia—necessitated by the political elites’ discursive interpretation of Stalinism—contributes to a mindset that accedes to and justifies the current authoritarianism among Russians. I will address each of these in turn.

Perpetuating the Manipulation of the Stalinist Discourse in Russia
Scholars have noted that states seek to reproduce the culture of power in society (van Dijk 2008; Gellner 1983; Gramsci 1971), and without some interruption to the process of this reproduction, the system will continue to perpetuate itself. The process of control instituted under Putin is already fairly comprehensive, and includes the formulation of suitable discourse by the political elite in the press and other mass media, as well as the educational system, while limiting discursive access to alternative narratives in the political and social spheres. Mendelson and Gerber (2008) assert that this process has become so thoroughly institutionalized throughout Russia that Putin’s policies would continue for some time even if Putin himself were to depart the political scene. The scope of the mechanisms implemented by the political elite mirrors Gramsci’s assertion that the struggle for control of culture must happen “wherever cultural activity occurs” (1971:342).

Even when subjected to influences designed to alter it, political culture is slow to change. This is evidenced by German political attitudes after World War II, which reflected ambivalence about National Socialism well into the 1960s (see Sherlock 2007a). But if new generations continue to be exposed to and indoctrinated in the discourse of the Stalinist past as it exists in Russia today, the effects of the generational change and the development of legitimate democratic institutions that eventually modified Germans’ attitudes will be lessened.

Further, the continued fostering of nostalgia for the Soviet era by the political elite also benefits the political elite and the status quo by quashing alternative narratives in Russian historical discourse. The Soviet era in general, and the Stalinist period in particular have been the subjects of mythical portrayals of rapid industrialization,
widening opportunities for education, the building of socialism, and above all, victory in the Great Patriotic War. It is because of these achievements that the political elite have been able to use Stalin as a symbol of the Soviet era. As Sherlock observes: “Older Russians can remember—and younger Russians imagine—the sense of unity and purpose of much of Soviet society under Stalin despite widespread economic privation” (2007a:166). But Stalin has become the symbol for the entire Soviet period—not just the temporal space he occupied in it (Nikolayenko 2008; Morozov 2008). The Soviet era is currently portrayed by the elite in Russia as “the golden age in the history of Russian statehood” (Morozov 2008:159). It becomes much easier to use Stalin as the symbol of this era when the discourse about him minimizes or ignores the political repression for which he was responsible, and during which over a million Soviet citizens were executed for fictitious crimes, while millions more were imprisoned in the GULAG system.

Soviet nostalgia is an important mechanism through which the discourse on the benefits of a strong state is reproduced. Its manipulation by the political elite should therefore not be surprising. As Mendelson and Gerber point out, however, “Nostalgia for Stalin in Russia is not simply a relic that will die out with the older generation. And as long as Russians remain ignorant about or have positive feelings toward a murderous dictator who institutionalized terror throughout their country, they are unlikely to mobilize behind calls for greater justice, human rights or transparency—factors critical to Russia’s transformation into a modern democratic society” (2006:3). It is particularly significant that younger generations of Russians—too young to have actually experienced the Soviet Union—are nostalgic for it (Nikolayenko 2008; Munro 2006). Or rather, they are nostalgic for the mythologized vision of it advanced by the political elite.
Implications of the Methods of Discourse Control in Russia

The elimination of political opposition by the political elite has not been a focus of this study, although I touch upon it in Chapter 5 and it is detailed elsewhere in the literature (e.g. Kryshtanovskaya and White 2009; March 2009; Smyth et al. 2007). Instead, I focus on the civil society sector as the ostensible wellspring from which political opposition would emerge. This seemed logical because it is in the civil society sector that the discourse of the Stalinist era has had the most impact, especially as it pertains to discursive access.

The limiting of discursive access to groups that advance human rights agendas, all of which are critical of the Stalinist past in Russia, also has profound implications for the likelihood of democratic change. Here the particular methods that the political elite employ to limit discursive access are salient. The political elites’ limiting of alternative narrative views that oppose the currently ascendant strong state narrative has occurred in such a way that organizations advancing democratic platforms are portrayed as Western agents, whose task is to undermine Russia’s national interests (Horvath 2011; Mendelson and Gerber 2008). The pro-democracy ‘colored’ revolutions that occurred in the former Soviet states of Georgia (rose), Ukraine (orange), and Kyrgyzstan (tulip) were cheered and praised by politicians and policymakers in the West, while they were anathema to the Russian political elite. Political opposition in Russia—revolutionary or otherwise—is portrayed as a direct threat to Russia’s security in part because it challenges the strong
state narrative. Examples of this phenomenon abound, and often have deleterious foreign policy implications. When protests of the parliamentary and presidential elections occurred in late 2011 and early 2012, respectively, Putin accused U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of sponsoring revolution (e.g. Herszenhorn and Barry 2011). Media attacks also occurred against the new U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, with the state-run NTV network portraying him as an agent sent to foment dissent within Russia. McFaul was forced to defend himself in the press as being an academic, “not a professional revolutionary” (Gabuyev et al. 2012).

The political elite both created and supported pro-state Russian youth organizations with the intention of having them serve as a bulwark against the sort of pro-democracy youth movements associated with the colored revolutions that occurred elsewhere in the Soviet space (Atwal 2011; Horvath 2011; Robertson 2009). This is among the efforts that have led to a zero-sum game in which one is either for the regime or against it (Schwirtz 2007); there is no middle ground or discussion of viable alternatives, because such alternatives are depicted as undermining Russia’s political stability, and are associated with foreign sponsorship as part of a campaign to undermine Russia’s security or interests. This is in keeping with the elite presentation of Russia as under siege from foreign enemies (Mendelson and Gerber 2008; Roginsky 2008).

Portraying the United States as a threat to Russia has had a chilling effect on U.S. and Russian diplomatic relations, which had been in a ‘reset’ mode following the downturn of the later years of the Bush presidency (Kramer 2010). It also contributes to a growing anti-American sentiment in Russia (Mendelson and Gerber 2008), and undermines democracy assistance programs in Russia (Carothers 2006; MacKinnon
The motivation of the political elite appears to be the creation of a rally effect that is intended to mobilize support behind the regime at a time of perceived crisis, i.e. a foreign threat, in the absence of genuine legitimacy (see, for example, Gibler 2010). Among many other leaders, this was also a tactic of Stalin’s, who used the threat of foreign spies, enemies, and saboteurs within Soviet society as the raison d’être of the Terror (Dobson 2009; Khlevniuk 2009).

The stated goal of Putin and his coterie is to modernize Russia, not to unleash a new wave of atomizing political violence. But their efforts to modernize have relied heavily on the centralization of authority in the executive. This has been accompanied by a bringing to heel of the Russian economic elite, who were increasingly obliged to follow Kremlin instructions (Dawisha 2011) or face consequences similar to those that befell Mikhail Khordokovsky, the former CEO of Yukos, who was sent to prison for fraud and tax evasion and his oil company dismantled and taken over by the state-owned oil company Sibneft (Hoffman 2003).

It is true that Putin and his elite have had substantial success in modernizing Russia, in the larger cities especially. During my fieldwork for this study in 2009, St. Petersburg and Moscow were both almost unrecognizable modern metropolises in comparison to how they looked during my days at university in Russia in the mid-1990s. Several liberal-minded Russians I spoke with were mindful of the limiting of political freedoms that has occurred under Putin, but their emphasis was on the good things that Putin had done for Russia. One young real estate agent in St. Petersburg, in particular, went on about how great he thought Putin was: “I could never do this job before [Putin came to power]. There was no opportunity.” When I asked if he liked Putin so much
because he changed the system from what existed under Yeltsin, he replied, “Under Yeltsin, there was no system. That’s the thing—[Putin] created the system.”

The economic sector has now come to be controlled largely by Putin and his elite, although this has occurred less through re-nationalization of private enterprises (especially in the oil and natural gas sectors), than as a result of informal control designed to ensure that sizeable portions of rents from these industries flow to the state (Dawisha 2011; Gaddy 2007). The economic statism of the political elite contributes to the widespread corruption that exists in Russia by solidifying the informal networks of patronage that are manipulated by the state (Gaddy 2007). This in turn diminishes incentives for workers to participate in societal and political associations that could advance their interests, and “perpetuates Soviet-era dependencies in the workplace” (Fish 2005:248).

**Transitional Justice, Democracy, and the Lack Thereof**

Mechanisms of transitional justice—the truth commissions, trials, lustration, and other polices designed to confront and reconcile painful pasts in countries with nascent democracies—have also not been a focus of this study. The reason for this is simply that Russia is nowhere near the point of honestly confronting its painful past. Indeed, the contrary has been the emphasis of this study—that the political elite in Russia downplay

---

73 I suggest that this is true despite the fact of the measures such as Karaganov’s campaign against the legacy of totalitarianism discussed in Chapter 5, and other measures that Andrieu refers to as “pseudo-transitional justice interventions, ones that do not aim at democratization and the protection of victims’ rights, but only at legitimizing the new political elite” (2011:200).
or manipulate negative aspects of the past in a way that allows them to glorify it *despite* egregious human rights abuses.

Some advocates of the transitional justice paradigm aver that addressing a painful past is necessary in order for democratization to occur (e.g. Andrieu 2011; Hayner 2001; Minow 1998). Other scholars, however, are not so sure, arguing that many democratic countries have willfully forgotten or downplayed negative aspects of their own histories, even while advocating reconciliation to others (Encarnación 2008). Still others advise caution when attempting to confront the past, particularly in circumstances where the emerging democracy is still fragile (e.g. Huntington 1991; O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

The Russian refusal to examine its past has been compared to Spain’s (Andrieu 2011), with its *Pacto del Olvido*—a formal agreement concluded as the country transitioned to democracy in the 1970s that institutionalized collective amnesia about the political violence of the Franco regime during and after the Spanish Civil War from 1936-1939. Some scholars argue that the Spanish case demonstrates that it is not imperative that a country address its difficult past in order to effectively establish and consolidate democracy (Encarnación 2008; Rigby 2001).

These comparisons, however, are flawed. In the Russian case, the collective memory of the past is not so much amnesia as it is a reflection of current discursive portrayals of Stalinism. As such, interpretations of the past in Russia are more akin to a collective ‘state-driven selective memory’, in which the events to be remembered are

---

74 There were atrocities on both sides during the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, with estimates ranging from 300,000 to 580,000 dead (Preston 1995; Jackson 1965). Franco’s subsequent dictatorship continued to persecute dissidents and former Republicans, and “[s]ome 400,000 people spent time in prisons, camps, or forced labor battalions” (Davis 2005:860), in addition to thousands more killed in the early postwar period.
selected by the political elite and then incorporated into the historical discourse (Forest and Johnson 2002; Mälksoo 2009). They are not consigned to oblivion as in the Spanish case, in which both sides, political parties on the left and right, agreed that the past would cease to be discussed. As Rigby says of the Pacto del Olvido, “A basic element was the avoidance of any reference to the Franco era” (2001:54). This included the revision of textbooks so that school history books ended with the civil war leaving Spanish youth with “only the vaguest of notions about Franco” (Rigby 2001:60).

Instead of Russian youth having vague notions about Stalin, they have ambivalent or even positive associations with him. The discourse of the Stalinist period in fact relies on not confronting the past. Because the discourse is used to legitimize those in power and to justify the means by which they perpetuate that power, it can scarcely be exposed to negative aspects of Stalinism that any of the transitional justice mechanisms mentioned above would engender. This is perhaps the fear that underlies the redundancy and interconnectedness of political elite’s measures to restrict discursive access to groups that seek to emphasize the more pernicious aspects of the Stalinist period. If the current regime in Russia is to survive, it must perpetuate the discourse of the system on which it has modeled itself.

This leads us to the counterfactual of this study: If the state did not control the discourse of the Stalinist period, what might be the outcome? I argue that in such a situation civil society groups dedicated to informing the public about the Stalinist period might be able to advance platforms that would make the current authoritarianism in Russia much less palatable. It seems that this is a main reason that the political elite limits access to the discourse of that period—because the political elite have modeled the
current Russian state on the Soviet one in many important ways, and because Stalin is the symbol of the entire Soviet era, the political elite simply cannot condone negative portrayals of him. The current strong state discourse promulgated by the political elite relies on the portrayal of the Stalinist period as positive, whatever negatives may also have existed. This means that Stalin’s legacy must remain untarnished by inconvenient facts and alternative narratives in Russian society.

In my view, this is why civil society groups such as Memorial are so important: Because there needs to be some mechanism or repository for memory of an unpleasant past to be kept alive until the time comes for that past to be addressed, the singular role that Memorial plays in fulfilling that mission magnifies its importance. This is especially true in that scholars have noted that many GULAG survivors are still fearful of reprisal or scorn for telling their stories in society openly (Figes 2007; Merridale 2003), and that even today there is a lingering stigma attached to having being a zek, or prisoner, in one of Stalin’s camps (Adler 2002). Perhaps of utmost importance, too, is the fact that many GULAG survivors are still deeply traumatized by their experiences (Gheith 2007). As Hochschild notes, “All the hundreds of former prisoners who have published gulag memoirs, all the dozens of them … who have so willingly told me their stories, are the healthy exceptions. For most survivors, the pain is too deep to share, perhaps even with those close to them, much less with a stranger. For them the wounds are unhealed” (1994:279). The state’s refusal to confront the painful past magnifies the importance of civil society groups who collect the evidence of that past.

The case of Spain also demonstrates that a time will eventually come when the past is confronted, even if what might be achieved in that confrontation is “truth rather
than justice” (Davis 2005:879). The number of people who survived the Soviet repressions gets smaller every year as they die of old age. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for is that victims can be identified with surety and a more complete tale may be told of what happened to them. In turn, this may serve as a cautionary tale of what a highly centralized state is capable of, and make a repetition of such events less likely (Minow 1998).

As noted in the previous chapter, there is currently a program underway that seeks to address the “totalitarian mentality” that is the result of Stalinism (Karaganov 2011). Yet this program does not intend to delve into the issue of Stalin’s responsibility for the political repression and other human rights abuses that occurred, nor is the program intended to be a “de-Stalinization” campaign (Karaganov 2011; Taratuta 2010). While this is perhaps not surprising given the limited focus on victims as opposed to perpetrators in the Russian discourse of political repression, it removes the assignation of responsibility and a whole telling of the Terror that are essential to the process of transitional justice (Rigby 2001; Minow 1998).

What might provide an impetus for addressing the past is the program’s proposal that the security services’ archives be opened. As noted elsewhere in this study, the majority of mass graves of NKVD victims during the Stalinist Terror have yet to be discovered (Adler 2005). Even a partial opening of these archives could be used to remedy that situation. The exhumation of mass grave sites is controversial, and the current proposal in Russia to open the archives is dependent on the agreement of the current security service, the FSB, which is not likely to be forthcoming in the current political environment.
In Spain, the exhumation of mass graves of victims of the Franco regime has led to a reappraisal of that period and attempts to reconcile the past. Describing the process that is underway in Spain, Ferrándiz explains that the exhumation process has led to a wider opening in society for discussion of a painful history: “Stories that had rarely been voiced, and then only in whispers, suddenly found, in the exhumations and the exposure of caches of bones, the resonating chamber they had lacked for over 60 years” (2006:10).

It should also be noted that the Spanish case, in which democratization took place despite the lack of transitional justice, is one of the exceptions (Rigby 2001). Most societies transitioning to democracy after authoritarian rule require that the past be addressed, acknowledged, and condemned (Minow 1998; Cohen 1995; on the latter see Connerton 1989). Schmitter and O’Donnell aver that

[i]t is difficult to imagine how a society can return to some degree of functioning which would provide social and ideological support for political democracy without somehow coming to terms with the most painful elements of its own past. By refusing to confront and to purge itself of its worst fears and resentments, such a society would be burying not just its past but the very ethical values it needs to make its future livable (1986:30).

The nature of the human rights abuses of the Stalinist era has had effects that linger in Russia to this day (Khlevniuk 2004) making it likely that any democratization truly representing the will of the people in Russia must first be preceded by a reckoning with the past. The informal rules described by both Ledeneva (2006) and Wedel (2005) have their origins in the unpredictability and harshness of laws that came into force during the Stalinist Terror. The ability to circumvent proper channels in order to obtain goods and services is also a phenomenon that can be traced to the *sui generis* culture that existed in the GULAG. This culture was spread to the wider Soviet society when

---

75 See Chapter 5.
prisoners and their minders began returning to Soviet society after Stalin’s death (Khlevniuk 2004; see also Dobson 2009).

Circumventing formal, i.e. legal, channels may have had practical applications in the Soviet centrally-planned economy and even in Russia today, but they perpetuate and exacerbate the corruption that exists in the economic, political and social spheres in Russia. Further, the perpetrators of Stalinist era human rights abuses “not only avoided punishment but made successful careers and served as examples to their followers. This corrupted the state apparatus and put the punitive organs above the law” (Khlevniuk 2004:343).

The above is reflected in the absence of perpetrators in the memorialization process in Russia (Etkind 2009; Roginsky 2008), which devalues survivors of the Stalinist period who went on to suffer personal, social, and economic consequences as a result of their time in the camps, or as relatives of repressed persons (Adler 2002; 1999; Applebaum 2003). It also implies that survivors’ traumatic experiences are so inconsequential as not to be worthy of punishing those who inflicted them (Adler 1999). The inadequacy of memorials and monuments to political repression reinforces the implication that survivors’ experiences are unimportant.

There is a substantial scholarship that speaks of the presence of ‘ghosts’ that haunt Russia; the spirits of those whose deaths have neither been avenged nor acknowledged as important by the society in which they lived (see, for example, Derrida 1994; Hochschild 1994; Gheith 2007; Etkind 2009). The emphasis of this study has been that their deaths are deliberately minimized in the discourse of the Stalin era as tragic but

---

76 (For more on the nature and extent of corruption in Russia, see for example Dawisha 2011; Gaddy 2007; Dinino and Orttung 2005).
necessary given the enormity of the tasks that required them. Perhaps one day their
deaths will be acknowledged, addressed, and appropriately memorialized. This may not
require the condemnation of the Soviet system entirely, as some advocate (e.g. Yakovlev
2002), but merely a full telling of its history. Perhaps this will one day quiet the ghosts of
the Soviet past that linger in the Russian present.
References


Rossii, 1900-1945: 11 klass. Uchebnik dlya uchashchikhsya obshcheobrazovatelnykh uchrezhdenii [History of Russia, 1900-1945: 11th class. Textbook for the study of general educational requirements]. Moscow: Prosveshcheniye.


______. 2004. “Hard and Soft in Cultural Memory: Political Mourning in Russia and Germany.” *Grey Room* 16 (Summer), pp. 36-59.


Gardner, James B. 2011. “September 11: Museums, Spontaneous Memorials, and


Gevurkova, Elena, Alina Biberina, Yevgeny Pchelov and Diana Fadeeva. 2010. GIA-2010: Ekzamen v Novoi Forme. Istoriya Rossii, 9 Klass. [State comprehensive
examination 2010: Exam in the new format. History of Russia. 9th class].
Moscow: Astrel.


Henderson, Sarah. 2011. "Civil Society in Russia: State Society Relations in the Post-


Hollander, Paul, ed. 2006. From the Gulag to the Killing Fields: Personal Accounts of


Karaganov, Sergei. 2011. “When Russia will be Free from Totalitarian Mentality?” *RIA*
Novosti (20 July). From Johnson’s Russia List 2011, #129.


Relations and European Integration. Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin, eds. pp. 65-83.
Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.


Mereu, Francesca. 2008. “Putin Made Good on Promise to FSB.” *The Moscow Times* (February 8).


______. 1996. Death and Memory in Modern Russia. *History Workshop Journal,* (42),
pp. 1-18.


or Co-optation for Civil Society in Russia?” *Demokratizatsiya* 10(2), pp. 147-165.


Oushakine, Serguei Alex. 2007. “‘We’re nostalgic but we’re not crazy’: Retrofitting the Past in Russia.” *The Russian Review* 66, pp. 451-482.


Wedel, Janine R. 2005. “Flex-Organizing and the Clan State: Perspectives on Crime and


