

CLASHING OVER COMMEMORATION

The Memory Politics of Sandarmokh

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Maisterintutkielma

Valtio-oppi

Yhteiskuntatieteiden ja filosofian

laitos

Humanistis-

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämä pro gradu- tutkielma tarkastelee, millaista muistin politiikkaa nyky-Venäjällä toteutetaan suhteessa Stalinin ajan vainoihin ja toiseen maailmansotaan, ja kuinka nämä kaikki kietoutuvat yhteen Sandarmohin joukkohaudasta käytävässä keskustelussa. Sandarmoh on Karjalan tasavallassa Koillis-Venäjällä sijaitseva joukkohauta Stalinin poliittisissa vainoissa vuosina 1937–38 teloitetuille vangeille. Vuonna 2016 läheiset siteet valtioon omaava Venäjän sotahistoriallinen seura esitti teorian, että suomalaiset sotilaat olisivat haudanneet Sandarmohiin teloittamiaan neuvostovankeja jatkosodan aikana. Teoria ei saanut tukea useilta venäläisiltä ja suomalaisilta historioitsijoilta. Sandarmohin parissa vuosikymmeniä työskennelleet historioitsijat Juri Dmitriev ja Sergei Koltyrin kritisoivat sotahistoriallisen seuran tulkintaa ja joutuivat molemmat vangituiksi. Tällä nähtiin olevan poliittinen motiivi monien mielestä.

Tutkimusaihetta lähestytään sosiaalisen konstruktionismin näkökulmasta, sillä muistin politiikka on tietoisien kehityksen tulosta. Tutkielmassa käydään läpi, miten muistin politiikka vaikuttaa valtiossa historiankirjoitukseen, politiikkaan, muistomerkkeihin sekä diskursseihin. Aineistona toimii Sandarmohista käytävä yhteiskunnallinen keskustelu venäjänkielisessä mediassa, ja sen tarkastelumethodina käytetään Michel Foucaultin diskurssianalyysia. Tällainen analyysi tarkastelee diskurssiin liittyviä sääntöjä, kuin myös sen ulkoisia ja sisäisiä prosesseja, sekä sitä kuka keskusteluun saa ja ei saa osallistua.

Tutkielmasta käy ilmi, että Venäjällä nämä kaksi historiallisesti toisiaan lähellä olevaa ajanjaksoa ovat hyvin erilaisessa asemassa. Siinä missä Stalinin vainoja käsitellään vähän ja jopa vältellen, on toinen maailmansota yksi tärkeimpiä historiallisia tapahtumia, myös poliittisesti. Tämä käy ilmi historiankirjoituksesta, yhteiskunnallisesta keskustelusta ja muistomerkkien määrästä.

Sandarmoh on viimeaikaisten tapahtumien kautta päätenyt paikaksi, missä nämä kaksi muistoa kohtaavat, ja sielläkin on nähtävissä toisen maailmansodan muistojen ensisijaisuus. Aihetta sivuava diskurssi on myös rajattua, sillä vain valtion historiankäsitystä myötäilevät historioitsijat saavat tilaa, kun taas kriittisiä äänenpainoja esittävät voidaan sulkea keskustelusta tai leimata muuten epäluotettaviksi. Dmitrievin ja Koltyrinin vangitsemiset toimivat äärimmäisinä esimerkkeinä siitä, miten keskustelusta voidaan sulkea ulos. Stalinin vainot ovat Venäjän valtiolle epämieluisa muisto, joten se halutaan korvata toisen maailmansodan muistolla.

Avainsanat: Venäjä, Sandarmoh, muistin politiikka, Stalinin vainot, toinen maailmansota

ABSTRACT

This Master's Thesis discusses what kind of memory politics are conducted in modern-day Russia in relation to Stalinist repressions and World War II, and how these all come together in the discussion surrounding the mass grave of Sandarmokh located in the Karelian Republic of Northwestern Russia. It is a burial site for political prisoners who were executed during the Stalinist repressions of 1937-38. In 2016 Russian Military Historical Society with close ties to the Russian government presented a theory, that Finnish soldiers could have buried in Sandarmokh Soviet prisoners of war who were executed during the Finno-Russian Continuation War. This theory did not receive support from many Russian and Finnish historians. Two Russian historians who had worked for decades with Sandamokh, Yuri Dmitriev and Sergey Koltyrin, criticized the interpretation of the Military Historical Society and were both imprisoned. This was deemed by many to have a political motivation.

The research topic is assessed from the point of view of Social Constructivism because memory politics is always a result of conscious actions. The research discusses, what kind of effects memory politics has in a state in relation to its historical writing, politics, commemoration and discourses. The research material consists of the societal discussion surrounding Sandarmokh in the Russian-language media, and the method used for its assessment is discourse analysis developed by Michel Foucault. This type of analysis takes into consideration the rules concerning discourse, both external and internal processes, and who can and cannot participate in the discussion.

The research concludes that in Russia these two historical eras close to each other are in a very different position. Whereas the Stalinist repressions are discussed very little and even with avoidance, World War II is one of the most important historical events, also politically. This can be seen in historical writing, societal discussion and commemoration.

Due to recent events Sandarmokh has become a place, where these two memories meet, and the primacy of World War II can also be noticed there. The discourse surrounding the topic is also restricted, as only those historians are given attention who support the state's interpretation of history, whereas those who present criticism can be excluded from the discourse or labeled otherwise suspicious. The imprisonment of Dmitriev and Koltyrin is an extreme example of such exclusion. Stalinist repressions are an inconvenient memory for the Russian state, so the aim is to replace it with the memory of World War II.

Keywords: Russia, Sandarmokh, memory politics, Stalinist repressions, World War II

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Sandarmokh – a dispute over a mass grave

Sandarmokh is a memorial site for victims of Stalinist repressions located in the Karelian Republic of Northwestern Russia in the Medvezhegorsk area. It is the biggest burial site in the region for victims of the political repressions of the 1930's, that were carried out by the Soviet secret police NKVD as part of different operations to eliminate anti-Soviet sentiments within the country. Altogether in the area more than 7 thousand people were shot between the years 1937-38. Many prisoners were brought to be executed in Sandarmokh from the GULAG prison camps that were located in the Karelian Republic, such as Beltbaltlag or Solovki. They were from different societal groups, like workers, farmers, artists and soldiers. Many different ethnicities were also executed in addition to Russians: Finns, Karelians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Belarusians and representatives of 60 other ethnicities. The mass graves were only found in 1997 and a memorial site was established there. On 5th of August every year at the Commemoration Day for the victims of political repressions a memorial service is organized by the church in Sandarmokh. The site is modest and located in a remote area.

This memorial site became an area of interest in 2016, when a peculiar chain of events started unfolding. Russian Military Historical Society claimed to have found remains of Soviet prisoners of war in Sandarmokh, who were executed by Finnish soldiers during the Finno-Soviet Continuation War of 1941-44. They claimed that thousands could have been executed there. The Society started excavations in Sandarmokh in 2018 and another round was conducted in 2019, and if they are to find remains of soldiers executed by the Finns, a memorial is to be erected for them on the site. Yuri Dmitriev (a historian who found the mass grave originally) and Sergey Koltyrin (the former manager of the Regional Museum of Medvezhegorsk and the one in charge of maintaining the memorial site in Sandarmokh) both stated, that it is impossible that Finns could have executed anybody on that particular location. Sandarmokh is located too far from Medvezhegorsk, where Finns had their prison camps for Soviet soldiers. Also, Sandarmokh was located just by the frontline, so it would not have made sense to take prisoners this far and closer to the front to be executed. Things took a dramatic turn, when Dmitriev was arrested in 2016 and Koltyrin in 2018, both for allegedly possessing child pornography. These arrests were deemed to be political by many. The attitudes towards Sandarmokh had already

changed before these arrests, as in 2016 for the first time in 19 years nobody from the state officials of the Karelian administration or local politicians of Medvezhegorsk region took part in the memorial service organized annually in Sandarmokh. The Karelian branch of Memorial, a Russian human rights organization, was deemed to be a “foreign agent” under Russian law already in 2015. Dmitriev was the founder of this branch, and he is well-known for uncovering acts of terror committed under Stalin’s rule.

1.2. Research question and earlier research on the topic

The main research question presented in this research can be summarized as the following: *What kind of memory politics are conducted in Russia concerning Stalinist repressions and World War II?* To illustrate this question, the mass grave of Sandarmokh is used as a case study, because these two memories clash there. This will be done by first assessing based on available literature, how these two historical eras are discussed in the Russian society in general, before moving into Sandarmokh. In order to draw a clear picture of what has happened there, a timeline is constructed of the events unfolding in Sandarmokh during the past five ears. This paves way to assessing the memory politics and discourses that can be seen in this case study.

When it comes to Sandarmokh, not much research has been published on it, as the discussion is mainly taking place in the media. This is probably because the situation is still ongoing, and even when writing this research, the unfolding events had to be followed closely so that the information contained in it would be up to date. At the time of concluding this research at the beginning of 2021 it still remains to be seen, what becomes of the whole situation. This research thus uses existing research on memory politics and Russia and applies them to a situation that to my knowledge has not been discussed so extensively yet. This research aims to tie larger societal tendencies in Russia together with Sandarmokh and to demonstrate, how similar procedures come into play there as well. The most important thing is to understand, how such sites like Sandarmokh represent something, that is not desirable for those in power. The literature on the topic demonstrates how the Stalinist repressions and World War II have very different roles in Russian society, and Sandarmokh is thus a very interesting place, since these both memories clash there. This is what the research intends to do: shedding light into this current dispute and how it relates to larger societal tendencies in Russia.

Memory politics has been researched quite extensively, especially from the sense of how history is used in political decision making. Lots of research has been conducted on different countries concerning how they deal with their past, and how it is used for political purposes. For example,

Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone have compiled a selection of essays called *Contested Pasts*, that discusses the relationship between history and memory in relation to who is entitled to speak for the past in the present. Zheng Wang has written a comprehensive book *Memory Politics, Identity and Conflict: Historical Memory As a Variable*, which discusses how historical memory can affect throughout the society in policy making, education and formation of national identity. Especially a memory of a conflict is important, as it can justify the outbreak of a new conflict or on the other hand facilitate reconciliation process. This has also been assessed by Jennifer Lind, as she points out in her book *Sorry States* how a country remembers its past violent policies can be a signal to other states whether such policies are still deemed viable. This literature helps in establishing the general theoretical framework for the research.

In case of Russia, there exists a good amount of literature concerning World War II commemoration, which has been used in this research as well. One of the most essential books on this is Stephen Lovell's *Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the present*, and Nikolay Kaposov's *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*. Olga Malinova has as well written excellent articles on Russian memory politics. These books and articles discuss extensively the importance of World War II to Russian society and politics. The Stalinist repressions have also been researched quite a lot, and what was most useful in this research was Aleksandr Etkind's book *Warped Memories*, which points out the complexities of the commemoration of this tragic historical era. Another book worth noting is *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, which is edited by Julie Fedor, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila and Tatiana Zhurzhenko. It includes texts written by different authors concerning World War II, its remembrance, neo-Stalinism and other phenomena in this field. This research goes beyond the aforementioned literature, which mostly discusses the repressions and war separately, as it combines these memories and comparatively discusses them side by side. Sandarmokh is a place that brings together these memories, and therefore requires this kind of comparative approach.

1.3. Method, sources and outline of the research

The research starts from the assumption that everything is socially constructed and therefore history, politics and their relationship to memory is a result of different conscious efforts. This is the main idea when discussing memory politics throughout the research. The method chosen for analyzing the situation is discourse analysis, as it was developed by Michel Foucault. The main idea in this type of analysis is to evaluate the order of discourse, that can be explained from the point of view of three dimensions: foundation, outside and inside. Once it has been

established what the discourse is, it should then be assessed what kinds of external and internal procedures are at play. This means presenting such questions like who can enter the discourse, who is excluded and to what master text participants must refer. This is a good method to assess discourse, because once it is established who are excluded, it can then be found out what cannot be said. A discourse never includes everything that can be said about a certain subject; therefore, it is important to know what is left out. Especially in a country like Russia, where freedom of speech is limited, it is essential to see what is not included in the discourse and to establish who can and cannot access it and what kinds of rules regulate the discourse.

The sources for the research used in the historical and theoretical part mainly consist of literature in the field of memory politics, discourse analysis and Russian/Soviet history. In the analysis part the used sources consist mostly of different articles published in Russian-language media outlets that discuss Sandarmokh. As the whole situation concerning Sandarmokh is still ongoing, there is quite little research available on it, and from the point of view of discourse analysis it is fruitful to analyze the tendencies that arise in public discussion. At the end of the research, in addition to used literature, also all internet sources are listed in alphabetical order and the titles of all Russian-language stories are translated into English. The research starts with Chapter 2, where the historical background of Stalinist repressions, World War II and Sandarmokh are presented. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework of the research and presents its aspects. Chapter 4 discusses the domestic national context and explains how Stalinist repressions and World War II are seen in modern-day Russian society and what kind of effects they have had. This paves way for Chapter 5 that discusses in detail how the events in Sandarmokh have unfolded during the past years. Chapter 6 analyzes this chain of events by using the established theoretical framework, and then final conclusions are drawn in Chapter 7.

2. A TALE OF TWO HISTORICAL EPOCHS AND A MASS GRAVE CAUGHT BETWEEN – STALINIST REPRESSIONS, WORLD WAR II AND SANDARMOKH

In order to understand, what kind of historical events are at the center of this research, it is essential to present them. Stalinist repressions of the 1930's and World War II are historical events that took place not too far from each other but are seen very differently in the Russian society. Sandarmokh is a memorial site for the victims of repressions and is one example of the tragic events that took place across the Soviet Union. At first glance it can seem odd that the memory of World War II could include Sandarmokh, since the war took place a few years later than the repressions. This question is discussed in more detail later in the research, but first a general historical context should be discussed in order to understand the memories that are associated with these historical eras.

2.1. Stalinist repressions

The roots of Soviet terror in the 1930's can be found in the Russian revolutionary traditions and the Bolshevik ideology. The term *vrag naroda* (enemy of the people) has been used ever since the Dekabrist movement of the 19th century, and the idea of solving societal problems with violence was an important part of Russian extremist movements and later it entered the everyday politics of the country, when the Bolsheviks came into power after the Revolution of 1917. First the violence was directed towards "others", like counterrevolutionaries, but later it spread to the ranks of the Party. This violence reached its peak under General Secretary Jossif Stalin's rule during the years 1934-39. By the 1930's there was a lot of criticism towards Stalin's policies, as the first five-year plan had caused starvation and problems within the industrial sector. Some local leaders of the Bolshevik Party had asked in the 17th Party Congress of 1934 that Sergey Kirov should replace Stalin as the General Secretary. In the same meeting Stalin received a significant number of negative votes, and Kirov only three. This did not please Stalin, and 1934 marked a turning point in Soviet political system. Kirov was shot to death in December of that year, and it was deemed to be carried out by certain people within the Party. It has been claimed that in reality Stalin organized Kirov's murder and used it as a facade to start purges towards the ranks of the Bolshevik Party, especially those who opposed him. (Luukkanen, 2009, 325-329)

The main reason for introducing terror was about the consolidation of Stalin's power. A vast number of past or potential hostile elements were either liquidated or sent to labor camps and the remaining population was expected to be obedient. Stalin wanted to secure his position for his lifetime, and threats that stood in his way were to be destroyed. It was not just the show trials of well-known Party members like Kamenev and Zinoviev, but many Bolsheviks who had been associated with Lenin between 1917 and 1924 fell victims to the repressions. In addition to political motives, another rationale for the terror was economic. The fast pace of industrialization and implementation of collective farming required a disciplined workforce and a compliant peasantry in the Soviet Union, and these were attained with the use of force. Measures were taken against reluctant factory managers in the early 1930's, while the NKVD operated its dekulakisation squads on the countryside to clear the resistance against collectivization. Additional labor was provided by the growth of the GULAG prison system, as the convicts contributed to the increasing pace of industrialization and in the building of massive construction projects, like the Belomor Canal. Stalin thus manipulated an authoritarian system built by the Bolsheviks, and turned it into a totalitarian one, where the pursuit of political and economic goals was carried out ruthlessly by the use of force towards the Soviet population. The exact number of those who died as a result of Stalin's purges is debatable; the number is somewhere between 4 and 40 million, based on different estimates. Another problem lies in distinguishing between those who died as a direct result of the purges, or as a result of famine or diseases resulting from Stalin's agricultural policies. (Lee, 1999, 18-27)

There also was a specifically national dimension to Stalin's terror, as it included a series of decrees that demanded "national operations" to be carried out against members of diaspora nationalities (Poles, Germans, Finns, Greeks and Iranians among others) within the country in order to "destroy espionage and sabotage contingents". From 1936 to 1938 more than 1,5 million people in these categories were arrested, and 36 percent of them (247 157 in total) were executed. This is a huge number, considering the fact that these were rather minor nationalities in Soviet terms. Two factors in particular explain these national operations. The first one was the fear of the impending war, as it was feared that the Soviet Union would find itself undermined by internal enemies once the fighting started. The second was the rather primordial understanding of nationality in the Soviet Union, which suggested that national traits were stronger than citizenship ties, and this meant that co-nationals of potential enemy states were enemies too. This was later seen in the form of national deportations during World War II. (Smith, 2014, 120-121)

2.2. World War II

In Russian history writing World War II started only in 1941, when Germany started Operation Barbarossa and attacked the Soviet Union on 22nd of June. Despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact between the countries, they were now at war with each other. The Soviet Union was unprepared for this war as Stalin did not expect Hitler to attack so early. In the beginning of the war Soviet troops experienced numerous defeats, and the German troops proceeded in many parts of the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union was not defeated and was able to launch a counter-offensive in December of 1941. What contributed to this was on the one hand the harsh discipline in the Soviet army, and the bad treatment of the local population by the German troops, which led the majority of the population to be against them. Old grudges were left behind as a result of Germany's attack, when Great Britain signed a cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union, and as the US sent material assistance, which greatly helped the Soviet troops. By 1943 after the Soviet victory over the German troops in Stalingrad it was clear that the Soviet army would eventually win, and in 9th of May in 1945 Germany surrendered to the Allied troops. The cost of war was dramatic to the Soviet Union, as the estimated number of deaths is around 25 million, out of which nine million were soldiers and the rest civilians. Almost every family suffered losses and one fifth of the adult population was killed in the war. (Luukkanen, 2009, 340-353)

World War II is up to this day central to how Russians see themselves. Opinion polls in Russia have consistently placed World War II at the top of the nation's list of defining historical moments. The war is known in Russian as *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna* (The Great Patriotic War), so this already implies its importance to the nation. The remembrance of war is important because it serves the purpose of a historical myth. This is quite different compared to the 1930's, which are referred to as a "complex and tragic era", where establishing human agency in the deaths of millions of people is difficult. World War II was a drastic experience for the Soviet people, but in addition to these destructive elements it brought the Soviet regime new opportunities. Internally it was strengthened by the growth of Soviet patriotism within the population and the consolidation of a loyal new elite. Internationally the regime had a large part of Europe in sights, and the war had an important ideological value, since the victory could have been interpreted as the culmination of the Bolshevik Revolution. (Lovell, 2010, 1-7)

2.3.” People, do not kill each other” – the Great Terror in Karelian Republic and the discovery of Sandarmokh

The case study in this research is a mass grave called Sandarmokh, and in order to understand why it has become such a disputed topic, it should first be discussed how it relates to the Stalinist repressions. The site is located 17 kilometers from the town of Medvezhegorsk in the Republic of Karelia in Northwestern Russia. Sandarmokh is known as the place for mass graves of people killed during the political repressions of 1937-1938. It is estimated based on archival records that around 9 thousand people were shot on the site, out of whom 3,5 thousand were residents of Karelia, 4,5 thousand prisoners from a prison camp located by the Belomor Canal construction site (commonly abbreviated as Belbaltlag) and approximately one thousand from Solovetsky prison camps. The first group of Karelian residents were first settled to a prison camp in Medvezhegorsk, from where they were sent to Sandarmokh. The second group of people that were brought to Sandarmokh from Belbaltlag were mostly part of the intelligentsia and religious affiliations. As can be seen, the people executed on the spot were from different societal positions: farmers, fishermen and hunters from the nearby areas, writers, poets, academics, military personnel, doctors, teachers, engineers, representatives of different religious affiliations and governmental workers. (Dmitriev, 1999, 295-300)

Many of these people had received a higher education not only in their home country, but in many European universities. They were a threat to the Soviet rule, because they could point out the numerous issues that existed in the Soviet system, such as the number of uneducated people in ruling positions. The executions in Sandarmokh started on August 11th in 1937, and they continued throughout the year 1938. People were brought there alive from different locations, shot and buried in shallow graves. (Ibid.) The commander on site was Captain Mikhail Matveev, who carried out the orders of the NKVD regarding execution of GULAG prisoners (Order no. 00447, that will be discussed in detail below). In October of 1937 based on this Order Matveev left for the town of Kem, where he received over thousand prisoners from Solovetsky prison camp. He was responsible for executing them, which was carried out in Sandarmokh between October 27th and November 4th. Later on, more people were brought there from different prison camps. ¹

¹ Novaya Gazeta: Palachi Sandarmokha <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/08/04/73337-palachi-sandarmokha> 4.8.2017

Sandarmokh was one piece in the bigger puzzle known as the Great Terror of 1937-1938. In order to understand what happened in the Soviet Union at the time, one must understand what kind of orders were given within the country and how they were carried out in the Karelian Republic. During these years throughout the country only a relatively small number of people were convicted in public show trials, but instead were killed in massive secret NKVD operations without any kind of court proceedings. The largest of such operations was so-called “Kulak Operation” (*кулацкая операция*) also known as “Order no. 00447” (*Приказ №00447*), that included different operations directed against former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements. The operation was prepared by the NKVD by the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (i.e., Stalin). It started on August 5th in 1937 and lasted in many regions until the spring of 1938 or even longer. The victims of this operation were not only the members of Soviet or Party elite, but also regular working people. Their sentencing was carried out by special organs known as “troikas” or “dvoikas”, in other words “trios” or “duos”.

The Karelian Republic was no exception in the sense that many victims in these operations were selected on a discriminate basis. However, there were some specific features to the region, such as the so-called “returnees” from Finland. These people were Karelians, Finns and Russians that had fled the Soviet Union after the collapse of independent Karelian republics between 1918-1920 and the suppression of the West Karelian uprising of 1921-1922, and were given amnesty in 1923 that allowed them to return. In addition to these people, many ethnic Finns had fled to the Soviet Union after the Finnish Civil War of 1918. These people were mostly Communists, who settled in Karelia and were quite big in number in the Republic. A peculiar addition to this were Finnish American émigrés, who had come to build socialism with their Karelian “brothers”. Many of these people would become victims of the so-called “national operations” undertaken by the NKVD, that were to eliminate networks of “espionage, sabotage, terrorist and insurgent networks” allegedly created in the Soviet Union by intelligence services of hostile foreign states. As a result of such operations national minorities and diasporas within the Soviet Union fell victims to repressions. In addition to Finns for example Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians and other people of different ethnicities were targeted within the Karelian Republic. Over 3000 people were shot during these operations.

Following the orders of the NKVD many prisoners were also executed in Karelia, as it accommodated one of the biggest GULAG prison camps within the country, Belbaltlag. This prison camp was created in the early 1930’s in order to build the Belomor-Baltic Canal, which

was already completed by the time the political terror started. However, around 60 to 80 thousand prisoners were still held in the prison camp. In accordance with Order 00407 a special Directive no. 409 was given, that demanded the “cleaning of the labor camps and prisons of the NKVD”. The order specified that out of all the prisoners a certain number were to be shot. This number was altogether 10 thousand people, and large prison camps were given additional limits up to 8500 people to be shot in total. This was not included in the regional quota of the given area in which a camp was located, and camp administrations received even more additional limits. This increased the final number of shot people close to 28 thousand, almost three times the original number.

The executed people were not given any hearings and no additional investigations were carried out; the camp administrations just came up with a list of people to be shot. These people were not told anything in advance, so they could not foresee their fate. By the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU based on Order 00447, in the Karelian republic 300 people were to be sentenced in the “first category” (i.e., shot) and 700 in the “second category” (prison camp sentence). The Belbaltlag prison camp was given a limit of 800 people to be shot in accordance with Directive no. 409. In total, during the years 1937-1938 according to statistics 10779 people were shot in the Karelian republic, and 1410 were sentenced to prison camps. As can be seen, additional quotas regarding people to be shot increased the final number of killed prisoners considerably compared to the lower official limits. ²

Sandarmokh with its mass graves was left forgotten for decades, as it was only discovered in 1997 by Venyamin Yofe and Irina Fliege, who were leaders of the Memorial Society in St. Petersburg, together with a local enthusiast Yuri Dmitriev from Petrozavodsk. The discovery was possible due to Captain Matveev’s testimony, that had survived in the archives. When excavations started on the site bones and skulls, many marked with bullet holes, were recovered. Today, wooden poles or stakes scattered across a pine forest mark every mass grave, and they have sharply angled roofs that remind of a peasant cross or a human with hands raised in prayer. There is also a stone obelisk, that features a sculpture representing falling prisoners and an angel. Above the sculpture, an inscription says “Люди, не убивайте друг друга” (People, do not kill each other). The Sandarmokh memorial site is one of the most important, best developed and secular sites of memory for the victims of Soviet terror. (Etkind, 2013, 191-192)

² Official web site of Sandarmokh memorial Cemetery: Great terror in Karelia (Большой террор в Карелии) <https://sand.mapofmemory.org/long-3/>

The site facilitates commemorative signs for killed Finns, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Poles and representatives of other nationalities. Altogether people from 60 different nationalities and 9 religious denominations were killed in Sandarmokh.³ Most monuments in modern-day Russia dedicated to the victims of Soviet terror lack information boards, are quite minimalistic and do not portray heroes or resistance but passive victims and their unavoidable suffering. They can thus be described as depoliticized images. The abstract symbolism embodied in them can be seen as a compromise between the need for memory and the dangers of political confrontation. Information on victims can be found in books and museums, not in public memorials. Sandarmokh is not an exception from this with its modest monuments and scarce information boards. (Etkind, 2004, 52-56)

2.4. Difference between the perception of Stalinist repressions and World War II in Russian society

*“It was a full-scale Russian-style fascism. The tragedy is that we have not repented.”*⁴ – Aleksandr Yakovlev, a Russian politician and historian on Soviet terror (2001)

” The victory of 1945 is not simply the central junction of meaning of Soviet history, which started with the October Revolution and ended with the collapse of the USSR; it is in fact the only positive anchor point for post-Soviet society’s national consciousness. Victory does not only crown the war, but as it were purifies and justifies it, at the same time withdrawing its negative side from any attempt at rational analysis, tabooing the topic. It makes it impossible to explain the causes and course of the war, or to analyse the actions of the Soviet leaders and the nature of a regime that subordinated all spheres of social existence to its preparations for the war.” – Lev Gudkov on his essay *“The fetters of victory”* (2005)

After Stalin’s death in 1953 his successor Nikita Khrushchev started de-Stalinization policies, which included the dismantling of his predecessor’s cult of personality and granting amnesty to over a million GULAG prisoners (almost half of the prisoners), that were imprisoned under Stalin’s rule. This caused the crime rate within the country to briefly increase. (Dobson, 2006, 20-24) Under Mikhail Gorbachev’s term his *glasnost* (openness) policies allowed another reckoning of the pre-war Stalin-era. However, this did not last long as the nation was more occupied with the soon-followed collapse of the Soviet Union and as the victims, witnesses and

³ Objects of historical-cultural heritage of Karelia: The buried victims of mass repressions (1937-1938) <http://monuments.karelia.ru/ob-ekty-kul-turnogo-nasledija/katalog-golubaja-doroga-ot-petrozavodska-do-pudozha/medvezh-egorskij-rajon/zahoronenie-zhertv-massovyh-repressij-1937-1938-gg>

⁴ Archives of Aleksandr Yakovlev: Документ № 82 Право на память. Общая газета, 18–24 октября 2001 г. Беседу вела А. Самарина. <https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1010107>

perpetrators of the terror were dying out. However, the most important reason for this fading of memory was that the Stalinist terror interfered too much with the patriotic memory of the war. (Lovell, 2010, 10-11) The Soviet terror has been hard to grasp, as the boundary between victims and perpetrators is not as crystal clear as it had been with Nazi crimes for example. The terror took place in waves, that targeted different ethnic, professional and territorial groups. From peasants to intelligentsia or state and Party apparatus, from Poles to Russians, nobody was safe. It was not very uncommon that perpetrators of one wave of terror became victims of the next. All this makes it very difficult to reach any rational understanding of these events. The nature of Soviet terror was suicidal, self-inflicted and state-led against its own citizens. Since there was no external authority, like an occupying force or an international court to dispense justice, there has been no serious debate in Russia over the problems of collective guilt, memory and identity regarding this terror. There is rather a historical amnesia in the country. (Etkind, 2013, 1-10)

The memory of World War II was controlled even before the war had completely ended. After the victory at Stalingrad the personality cult of Stalin entered a new, more intense phase. Even though after 1945 Stalin remained at the core of accounts of the war, the Russian people (*narod*) was given a lot of praise for its role, but soon this faded into giving the people their usual role as small actors in the narrative of Communist triumph. This required writing out of this narrative many ambiguities and contradictions concerning the war, including the NKVD atrocities in Poland and the Baltic states before the Germans attacked the Soviet Union and the war crimes that the Soviet troops committed on its march towards the West during the years 1944-45. Also, one notable ambiguity is that in Russian history writing the first years of World War II from 1939 to 1941 are ignored. It was also left out that hundreds of thousand had been worked to death in GULAG's, whereas others were conscripted to labor battalions, and frontline soldiers had been kept fighting by "blocking units" threatening to shoot anybody who retreats. The victory was celebrated in 1946 and 1947, but this tradition was discontinued. Stalin's role in the war was diminished after his successor Nikita Khrushchev started de-Stalinization policies. However, the importance of war was kept in place. His successor Leonid Brezhnev confirmed the centrality of the war to Soviet self-understanding, and Victory Day was re-instituted as a public holiday in 1965. (Lovell, 8-10) Victory Day is not a day of mournful commemoration of the dead, but it is literally the day of victory, and its triumph is exclusively reserved for Russians. Victory only has a meaning within the structures of Russian self-determination. (Gudkov, 2005)

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia as its legal successor state had to demarcate between what was “Russian” and what was “Soviet”. The political elite quickly abandoned the idea of a new Russian democratic identity that would replace the Soviet totalitarian past, but selectively adopted the Soviet legacy without much critical reassessment. The memory of Great Patriotic War proved to be the most politically usable element of Russia’s past in a situation where the awareness of the home-grown destructive Soviet regime had made building a positive self-image quite problematic. What has also made the adaptation of the triumphant war narrative easier is that it has consistently enjoyed a high level of social acceptance and has rarely been subjected to criticism. Under president Putin’s rule the importance of World War II has increased, as in the beginning of his presidential term he wanted to consolidate the divided Russian society by borrowing some ideas from the left-patriotic opposition and reintroduced selected symbols of the Soviet past. He wanted to emphasize the centuries-long tradition of Russian statehood, and in it the myth of Great Patriotic War is essential. It is also a myth, that almost all actors across the political spectrum see as a significant event in Russian and world history. What also makes its use convenient is that it still exists in the communicative memory of the people and politicians who address it, can count on a strong emotional resonance within the Russian society. (Malinova, 2017, 43-59)

3. MEMORY POLITICS

According to Johan Galtung it is important to note that different civilizations and hegemony are driven by motivations that can be derived from their culture. A civilization can be seen as a macro-culture, that spans considerable regions in space and time, and it programs the nations in general, and the national leaders in particular for patterns of international behavior. Galtung sees that cultural factors can be divided into three categories, which are Chosenness, Myths and Traumas (known as chosenness-myth-trauma-complex, CMT). Chosenness means that collective sentiments of grandeur are imposed on a nation, meaning that some transpersonal force has chosen them, be it some divine entity or history. This is then built into the myths of a glorious past, that is to be recreated, as the present time is being suspended between the glorious past and the glorious future. History can be used as its own validation here, as it can be used as a way to prove how having a certain past means that a nation was chosen. Traumas can also be used as a similar proof, because suffering can be a sign that there is a deeper meaning in it and a more positive outcome, like even a glorious future is still waiting to be revealed. (Galtung, 1996, 253-255) Every nation has a history and memories that are transferred throughout generations. It can be in the form of myths of greatness, or tragedies involving pain and suffering, but every nation has elevated something from their history into the position that all citizens are aware of. It is not a coincidence what kind of memories exist on a societal level, and this is where memory politics and discourses concerning history appear hand in hand.

3.1. Social constructivism – Nothing is there by a chance

Key historical events are powerful ethnic or large-group markers, as certain struggles shape group identity and bring people together. Just like past victories and great accomplishments bind the individuals in a large group together, so can past traumas. However, only some traumas remain alive over years and become “chosen”. Understanding chosen traumas is essential in separating the process of generational transmission of past historical events and the formation of group identity. Feelings of shame that surround past traumas can create a situation where the victims both over-exaggerate current threats and incite strong feelings for revenge. Thus, the beliefs of history and memory often motivate the escalation of conflict and the course of its development. In order to assess memory politics, a good starting point is collective identity formation. Ethnic, national or religious identities are built on historical myths that define who

a group member is, what it means to be a group member and who is the enemy of this group. Understanding a group's collective memory helps in better understanding their national interests and political actions. A constructivist approach sees identity as manufactured, not given, and emphasizes that both ethnicity and identity are socially constructed. People learn their group's history in addition to their parents and grandparents from schools, history books and mass media. (Wang, 2017, 11-13)

According to Ian Hacking social constructivism starts from assessing a certain phenomenon, that is called simply *X*. The first thesis is that *X* is not determined by the nature of things and is not inevitable (1). It was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history; things that all could have well been different. From this, many social constructivists, but not all, move further to second premise that *X* is quite bad as it is (2). Third premise that follows states that things would be much better if *X* were done away with, or at least radically transformed (3). The main thing is to see that *X* is not inevitable (1), even if it is not a bad thing per say and there is no need to proceed to theses (2) or (3). However, a precondition must be satisfied for thesis (1) to be applied: in the present state of affairs, *X* is taken for granted and appears to be inevitable (0). There is no inclination to talk about the social construction of *X* without statement (0). Three distinguishable types of things are said to be socially constructed according to Hacking: objects, ideas and elevator words. Objects are vaguely speaking items of very different categories in the world, whereas ideas are conceptions, concepts, beliefs, attitudes and theories that are discussed, accepted, shared, stated, worked out, clarified and contested. Elevator words are things like facts, truth, reality and knowledge that can be constructed, but work at a different level than words for ideas or words for objects. There can also be interaction between objects and ideas. An idea, like a classification, can be applied to objects like people, who in turn can be aware how they are classified and modify their behavior accordingly. (Hacking, 2000, 1-34)

This chapter focuses on how constructions of memory affect nations, their history, politics and commemoration of different events. After this it is assessed, how discourses about history are constructed and what kind of interpretations are allowed and excluded. Finally, it is discussed what kinds of challenges the current culture of "post-truth" can have in a historical debate, when facts and opinions compete with each other. One should remember that it is not by a chance how history is seen in country, or what kind of policies are done based on memory. The constructivist approach by Hacking presented above is a good guide, when reading through this

chapter. Even if it seems that the state of affairs in a country is inevitable, this is not the case. There is always a process that has led to it; a construction has taken place. This is then disseminated to the larger population through media and education.

As Galtung stated, a nation must be made believe that they are chosen, and thus have a special role in the world, and it is proved by their history. Myths and traumas from history are employed as ways to underline this thought, as there is a reason for the suffering a nation has endured, and a great future awaits. Therefore, what kind of history is taught in school, which historical traumas are reminisced and what kind of policies are implemented based on historical memory give some indications on what people living in a nation are supposed to believe and expect. This is a good starting point when trying to see behind the seemingly inevitable situations. Discourses are also not just happening, they are controlled through exclusion and inclusion, and have both external and internal processes. This is where Michel Foucault's discourse analysis theory helps to see the order of discourse and what kinds of processes of control are present. It is not only important what is said, but what is not said.

3.2. Memory of nations

As was stated by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, social interchanges are vital to who we are and become, to the way we process our past and remember and evaluate our experiences. What people retain in their memory of past experiences are not just simple imprints, but truly active selections and reconstructions of the past. Even private and most intimate memories are the result of an ongoing dynamic social process that are composed in a given physical, sociohistorical environment. They are stored in memory and recollected through continuous interchanges with significant others and groups. Each of these groups has its own set of codes and customs and history - a collective memory, which defines what is important and meaningful within the group. People try to make sense of their personal experiences within or against this collective memory, making individual and collective memories dialectically related, as private recollections are constantly evaluated and shaped by confrontations with collective memory. In order to be kept alive, individual recollections need to be shared at an interpersonal level and for such recollections to resonate between the narrator and listener they both should share a common background, and preferably belong to the same space and time. (Apfelbaum, 2010, 85-92)

Memories are also important on a national level, where all members have their own personal memories and are influenced by collective memories. According to Benedict Anderson, a nation is an imagined political community, because even in the smallest nation its members will never meet most of their fellow-members or even hear about them. However, in the minds of people there is communion between the members living in a nation. The nation is imagined as limited, because they always have boundaries, which separate nations from each other. It is also imagined as a community, where regardless of all kinds of inequality and exploitation there is a deep and horizontal comradeship. Such fraternity makes it possible for people to kill or die for such imaginings. (Anderson, 5-7, 2006) Therefore, in a nation memory plays an important role, as many things that seem “natural” to its members are actually a result of selective remembering and forgetting.

The historical memory of a society also shapes its members’ personal memory, and such experiences gain their full meaning within a broader social, cultural or historical context. Society’s public historical chronicles and official memorialization procedures determine what constitutes the legitimate content of traditions and social customs, this meaning the norms and limits within which the processing of memory and the construction of individual identity can take place. Such official narratives are not static and can change over time, and this is the result of politics of memory. Halbwachs noted that whereas collective memory is mainly related to traditions and customs stemming from a common cultural background, historical memory deals with the long-term foundations of memory. It introduces the notion of duration and continuity in cultural components themselves, and the traces of past can be seen everywhere in a society, be it in its ruling institutions or in daily physical environment. Therefore, personal memories of people are not only related dialectically to the collective memories a person is affiliated with, but also to the broader historical memory of the society in which the person lives. The traces of this past constitute the background foundation of the construction of one’s identity. (Apfelbaum, 2010, 85-92)

On a similar note, Eric Hobsbawm has written about invented traditions, that are “*a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.*” Invented traditions are invariant in nature, and whether being real or invented they impose fixed practices, such as repetition. Inventing traditions is a process of formalization and ritualization, with a reference to the past. Such rituals can be deliberately invented by a single initiator, or they can be officially instituted or planned by private groups

or political entities. They can also be based on old traditions, and seemingly new traditions can be just adaptations of older ones, that are used for new purposes. Ancient materials can also be used to construct invented traditions of a novel type. According to Hobsbawm, there are three overlapping types of these traditions: establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities; establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority; and socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior. (Hobsbawm, 1992, 1-14)

During the last decades there has been a “memory boom” among scholars in many societies worldwide. Whereas in some countries the memory of traumatic events is still raw and processes of settling the accounts is still to be done in the political agenda, in others the traumatic events are further in the past and the main issues involve debating and institutionalizing an appropriate culture of memory and collective identity for future generations. Collective memories can also be positive and thus key elements of national identity and can have substantial implications on national policies. As both traumatic and heroic collective memories tend to coexist, in many countries finding a balance between both heroic and traumatic memories is one of the biggest dynamics. Collective memory is however not limited to domestic politics and culture, it also has importance in international relations. Domestic regime types and political cultures affect the regional and international context. This can mean among others determining who is responsible for a given historical trauma or forming the identities and values of domestic actors in the international realm or developing certain foreign policies in order to rectify the causes of the traumatic memory. (Langenbacher, 2010, 13-29)

When a country evaluates another country’s intentions, one of the things that it observes is how this country remembers past violence. Remembrance can be seen as a costly signal, which means that a country is not intending to adopt aggressive policies. This can for example be done through disarmament or contrition, where the population is taught about their country’s past violence, the victims are respected and violence against them delegitimized. On the other hand, if a country needs to mobilize for war, it requires in addition to weapons and troops support within the military and general public. In order to prepare a society to fight, leaders employ nationalistic and patriotic sentiments, where the adversary is vilified, while glorifying their own state’s history, motives and current goals. Countries that are schooled about their past wrongs are more resilient to whitewashed and mythologized versions of their past, and the public is more difficult to mobilize by using such ends. States’ interactions are also shaped through how

they perceive each other's identities that are formed in particular historical and regional contexts. In such perceiving remembrance can be an important factor, because it matters whether a country justifies or glorifies violent policies, as it can cause other countries to fear that they still are viable tools of statecraft. Contrition on the other hand shows that a country has different values today than it did when committing the acts. (Lind, 2008, 11-13)

3.3. Memory and history – Who controls the past, controls the future?

State policies regarding remembrance can have widespread effects on education for example, as history textbooks in schools convey a certain message to students. Some parts of history within a nation can be chosen to represent people living in a nation, and policies can be justified based on such history. Collective memory is thus something that is imposed on people in school or by just observing, as it is not by chance what people see and hear in a society surrounding them. It has to be looked into what kind of memorials are in place, what national holidays are celebrated based on what historical events and how one's national identity is understood. The way history is seen, or politics are done is through dynamic choices based on national and political interests.

Ernest Renan, a French historian, on his lecture from 1882 titled *“What is a nation?”* said the following: *“Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial.”* (Renan, 1996, 44) As Renan has pointed out, history can have certain goals and agendas regarding what people remember. There are different ways to read and interpret history. Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote on his essay *“On the Use and Abuse of History for Life”*, that there are three types of history: monumental, antiquarian and critical. Monumental history draws inspiration from heroic deeds of the past, like the American Revolution and its founders. Such history seeks inspiration from the past that should influence how to act in the future. The obvious drawback of such reading is that it has no critical aspects, and it forgets the “losers” of history. Antiquarian way of looking history sees it merely as a thing to be studied for history's sake. This can make the old seem as something good by default, and everything new as doubtful, if not scary. Critical history on the other hand takes an honest look in the past without trying to please or admire. (Nietzsche, 2010, 19-30)

Benedict Anderson has discussed this speech given by Renan a century later in his book *“Imagined communities”*. He noted that it is a characteristic device in construction of national narratives to ensure that people *“have already forgotten tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be reminded”*, meaning that certain ways of reading history are preferred over others, and some events should not be reminisced. History should be employed in a certain way, in order to direct people to think their nation’s history through a particular lens. According to Anderson, profound changes in consciousness bring with them characteristic amnesias. Such oblivions create narratives in specific historical circumstances. When building a narrative for a history of a state, it is very different from that of a person. Whereas a person’s life has a beginning and an end, a nation does not have such, at least never natural. A nation’s biography is likely to include deaths, and they must be remembered/forgotten as *“our own”*. Therefore deaths, that took place inside the country and were carried out by people of the same nationality are left out in order to serve a narrative purpose, because of their destructive nature for the construction of a nation. (Anderson, 2006, 187-206)

Writing history was seen before as a way to preserve memory of a dynasty, state and such institutions in order to legitimize them and ensure their continuation. In this case it was needed that they were provided with an honorable past. Only those events were memorized, which supported the interests of the ruling class. With time, history and memory became polarized, as many scholars in the field of history, sociology and such argued that historical documents can be falsified in order to secure the establishment. Therefore, it is the job of the historians to either support or criticize national memory constructions. Some critics saw that collective memories are created by specific groups and are thus biased and partial against history that is the universal memory of humanity. Some on the other hand saw memory as an indispensable and important part in assessing the past. More recently, memory and history have been understood to be interacting and complementing each other, where the other falls short. A catalyst for this new understanding was the collapse of Communism starting in 1989 that brought with them profound political changes. As archives opened in many countries after the collapse of authoritarian regimes, emerging histories and memories that were up to that moment silenced entered the public arena with force. This created a chance to assess the past in a new way, and it clearly proved that much of what had been understood as objective history was in fact a biased construction of political memory. (Assmann, 2008, 49-72)

3.4. Memory and politics – What can be justified with the past?

As was stated above, history and memory are connected, and their relationship is not always so straightforward. Politics and memory can also be connected, and how it is understood can vary. Memory in itself cannot necessarily constitute politics, people usually rather see it as a rhetoric about the past that is mobilized for political purposes, not as an autonomous force that could dictate a political situation. (Boyarin, 1994, 2) Memory is an essential factor in nationalism and in building such narratives. The past is mobilized in order to enforce some memories on a national level, and this is the core idea memory politics. How the past is understood has strategic, political and ethical consequences. When the meaning of the past is contested, it also means contesting the meaning of the present and over the ways of taking the past forward. (Hodkin & Radstone, 2003, 1-3)

In the present moment the main question usually is, who is entitled to speak for the past in the present. This means that there is a conflict of representation, rather than about what actually happened in the past. Even if there is an agreement on the course of events, there can be arguments on how this truth is most fully represented or what explanatory and narrative context would best describe the episode. Especially if the arguments are historical, memory has its own role, as it also is about the present even more directly than history. As tempting it is to use memory as a way to better understand the truth about what happened in the past, as it is still live and active, memory much like truth is a destabilizing and unstable term. Memory cannot only be seen as an experience of events how they really happened; it is not always a guarantee of certainty. The reliability of memory and experience as exact records of the past, like the notion of historical truth, is questionable. (Ibid.)

The connection between memory and politics should be clarified, or there is a risk that the past may be ignored, reconstructed or manipulated and then employed as a mythological justification for the present. How a subject or a historical event or period is studied influences how it is remembered, and this not only determines what history means in the present but can also influence future actions. Therefore, how the past is remembered has a profound impact on what people do and how they live, thus making it a distinctly political phenomenon. If present policies can be justified with memory, this kind of control is a type of political power and the persons who are capable to manipulate memory (and the valued symbols of a society or a group that come with it) hold political power. Memory can thus be seen as a sociopolitical phenomenon as it is related to power and to the position in

which an individual or group is placed or places itself. Those who can control memory, can also create myths that are presented to the larger audience. (Hirsch, 1995, 10-28)

Myths are used in order to organize and explain the world, and they are not in themselves good or evil. In them rational and irrational elements are combined into an acceptable explanation or justification for something, like the actions of the state. Myths are stories about the past, that have the function of justifying the present. Memories can thus be a sum of eyewitness accounts that are believed to be true and myths that are true, believed to be true or not true even remotely. When a memory is transformed into history, it can have positive or negative effects. It can serve as a basis of social cohesion in a state, but those who possess power can use them as a way to create an illusion of such consensus. In nation states those in power perpetuate certain myths, that justify or rationalize the policies that the leadership or the state wishes to pursue. National self-image is enhanced by memories, especially those about the state responding to a crisis situation. Such actions allow the nation not to confront reality and to forget or suppress certain memories (Ibid.)

3.5. Commemoration and institutionalization

Countries remember past violence through official (government policies on remembrance) and unofficial (views of the broader society) channels. Governments reveal their interpretations of past violence through various instruments, like statements, reparations, legal trials or commemoration. Leaders' statements give quite a good indication on what is the historical record of a country. Also, it should be looked into what kind of agendas are set for scholarly research or civic activism and how textbook coverage is shaped. Reactions to statements also serve as a good signal on what is acceptable say or not, because if a politician is demoted or fired due to something that was said, this clarifies what the government sees an acceptable interpretation of the past. Remembrance can be institutionalized within a country, meaning that it is included in laws and policies. This indicates the level of national support for a given historical interpretation and shows that this will be transmitted to future generations. If a country chooses to pay reparations for its past injustices, it requires agreement among the majority of elected officials and in turn reflects how their constituents support this. If perpetrators of past violence are held accountable in legal trials, this helps to establish an official historical record. The past can also be remembered through commemoration like national monuments, museums, ceremonies and holidays. By choosing to commemorate something, the government confers recognition and honor. Because there can only be a limited number of monuments and national holidays, and numerous candidates compete for memorialization, what

a country chooses to honor are important indicators of political opinion and national priorities. (Lind, 2009, 13-15)

According to Alexander Etkind, there are two forms of memory: soft and hard. The first consists primarily of texts and the latter of monuments. These both memories are interdependent, as museums, cemeteries and history textbooks are complicated systems, that demonstrate permanent, multilevel interactions between the “hardware” of memorials, sculptures and historical places. The “software” included in guidebooks, inscriptions and historical studies is also an important part of cultural memory, since monuments without inscriptions are mute, just as texts without monuments are short-lasting. The hardware of historical memory, for example in monuments, stays mute and almost invisible unless they interact with software, which is the current intellectual and political discourse. Likewise, the software, such as public opinions and historical debates would pass away with every generation or even fashion, if they were not embodied in and anchored by monuments. Therefore, the hardening of memory is a cultural process with specific functions, conditions and thresholds, which requires interaction between the hardware and the software. (Etkind, 2004, 37-41)

For a modern nation-state immortalizing the memory of its victories and leaders is not just an indispensable instrument but a part of its internal structure. Such monuments demonstrate the continuity of the political tradition of a nation-state and by celebrating the past, the state affirms its continuing connection with this past. They represent the identity of a nation-state as a desired unity between the state, the people and their common history. A “truth” is produced that is imposed upon citizens and observers. Likewise, imperial countries do not usually erect monuments that memorialize their guilt. Memory of collateral suffering that resulted from national glory is more often preserved in oral or written texts than in monuments. If monuments are built for its former victims, the state in turn asserts its own transformation by affirming the difference between the current and the former state. (Ibid.)

War memorials can either be seen as a primary response to the popular need to mourn or as a tool for nation building. War memorials are places, where families and communities come to terms with their loss, so it offers place to help in the personal process of mourning. On the other hand, war memorials can be used as a tool to create a nationalist myth of war, that is enshrined in military cemeteries and commemorative services in addition to war memorials. This kind of myth of nation provides justification for the atrocities of war, and especially portrays individual deaths as a noble sacrifice. The nation that is either born or

strengthened in warfare provides an account, where war is no longer traumatic. It can be said, that creating such a myth has led to domestication of modern war and its acceptance as a natural part of political and social life. (Edkins, 2003, 92-94)

Memorials of genocide and famine are more complex, as in such cases usually the nation has turned against a section of its own people. This excludes the rhetoric of “sacrificing oneself for the greater good of a nation”, which is common in war memorials. Such deaths cannot be rationalized or made sensible. An interesting example of a genocide, that has been used in state building in this sense is the Holocaust, and its meaning to the state of Israel. In the first decades following the Holocaust the accounts of the survivors were ignored. Only in the 1960’s after the trial of Adolf Eichmann they were incorporated into the new Israeli state and were seen as a reason that demonstrates the need for fighters, who had their part in the founding of this state. (Edkins, 2003, 111-127) On the contrary, a state can completely silence the remembrance of a genocide, for example in the case of Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union. Even though the terrible experience of repressions and camps of extermination lasted longer than Fascism and Nazism, Stalinist crimes are not remembered in Europe nearly to the same extent as the aforementioned crimes have been. (Hodkin & Radstone, 2003, 245-246)

Education is also a sector of society, where institutionalization of remembrance can take place. Textbooks are the most important tool for the state in transmitting to students the official knowledge accepted by historians and sanctioned by the state. Textbooks represent who and what constitutes a nation and presents a nation’s official history. Therefore, states use public institutions and language to create and maintain identity. (Worden, 2014, 11-12) Public education is the most systematic and organized effort to influence the next generation. Textbooks shape a country’s view of itself and others by posing such questions like who attacked them, or who was to blame for the war. Regimes that intent on aggression tend to use their educational systems in order to deploy nationalist myths that whitewash their past aggression and blame the intended victims. The link between history, education, national self-image and national policies causes different groups with various visions of patriotism and policy goals to argue over textbooks. (Lind, 2008, 15) This all demonstrates how governments shape national remembrance through various policy instruments and indicates quite well how the current government interprets its past and also gives some indication on how the country is likely to remember it for years to come.

3.6. Discourses – What is and is not said

In the process of constructing policies, for example relating to memory, discourses are essential. They are always created, maintained or silenced in case it goes against the state-accepted doctrines. Discourse in its literal sense means according to Cambridge Dictionary “*a speech or piece of writing about a particular, usually serious, subject.*” When assessing policies, what is of interest is how discourses emanate and are kept alive. In doing this, the focus goes further than just analyzing utterances and statements by looking into rules and structures of discourse. The starting point is to identify and characterize different discourses. First, it should be identified, what are the main parts of the world that are being represented (including areas of social life), in other words the main themes and the particular perspective, angle or point of view from which they are represented. Discourses are both distinguished by their ways of representing and by their relationship to other social elements. The most distinguishing factors in a discourse are features of vocabulary and the way how discourses structure the world differently by focusing on semantic relationships between words. When different discourses come into conflict, what is usually contested is the preconstructed semantic systems that generate particular visions of the world, which have the power to sustain or remake the world in their image. Vocabularies associated with different discourses in a particular area of social life can be partly different, but usually tend to overlap. Semantic relations, like collocations help in differentiating discourses that use similar words by focusing on co-occurrence patterns of words, that most frequently precede or follow a certain word. Also, metaphors differentiate discourses by either representing one part of the world being extended to another (lexical metaphor) or by representing processes as entities (nominalization). (Fairclough, 2004, 123-133)

Michel Foucault and his work on discourse analysis provide a critical approach in assessing the procedures of discourses. In his Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France from 1970 known as *The Order of Discourse* Foucault tackles different procedures, and divides them into three dimensions: exclusion, rarefaction and restriction. According to him, in every society “*the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.*” (Foucault, 1981, 52) Procedures of exclusion, most notably prohibition, are well known in societies. Not everyone has the right to speak of anything, there are speaking subjects that have privileged or exclusive right to it, and the prohibitions that surround discourse very soon reveal its link with desire and

power. Discourse can be according to Foucault the object of desire, and it does not only translate struggles or systems of domination; it is the power that is to be seized. Another form of exclusion are division and rejection of discourses. This has traditionally meant the division between reason and madness, as it is usually the madman whose discourse cannot have the same value as that of others. This kind of speech did not exist, it was rejected on the outset as null and void. (Foucault, 1981, 52-53)

In addition to procedures of exterior control and delimiting discourse, there are also internal procedures, in which discourses themselves exercise their own control. Foucault calls these principles of internal control “rarefaction”, which are commentary, the author and disciplines. Commentary is understood as texts opposed to major texts which remain said and are said again. These can be juridical, religious or literary texts, that have a privileged position, and other texts are thus commentaries on these. This hierarchy is active, as sometimes major texts disappear and commentaries move into primary position, but this function of differentiating primary and secondary texts remains. Another form is author, which is not necessarily the individual who wrote the text, but a principle of grouping discourses conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence. This could also mean anonymous, yet binding texts, such as decrees or contracts that do not derive their meaning or efficacy from a specific author to whom they could be attributed. The third internal procedure is disciplines, which means a domain of objects, a set of methods and a collection of propositions that are considered to be true. However, a discipline is not the sum of all that can be truthfully said about something. Each discipline recognizes true and false propositions, but it leaves out knowledge that is beyond its margins. (Foucault, 1981, 56-60)

The third procedure in control of discourses is restriction. It concerns speaking subjects, as only those who satisfy certain requirements can enter the order of discourse. Not all regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable, but some are largely forbidden, and some others seem to be almost open to everybody. Foucault mentions as an example from the past so-called “societies of discourse”, where discourses circulated in a closed space and were distributed only according to strict rules, for example among rhapsodists who recited knowledge of the poems through memorization and only this group of people and their apprentices were able to access this knowledge. Therefore, the roles of the speaker and listener were not interchangeable. Even though such societies hardly exist today, Foucault argues that the “true” discourse, even if it is free from all ritual, still includes forms of appropriation of secrets and non-interchangeable roles. Even if so-called doctrines (religious, political or philosophical) seem to be contrary to

these “societies of discourse”, as they allow in principle free discussion among those who participate in it, this is usually not the case. (Foucault, 1981, 61-63)

Whereas in scientific disciplines discursive control would apply only to the form or the content of the statement and not to the speaking subject, doctrinal allegiance puts in question both the statement and the speaking subject. The speaking subject is put in question through and on the basis of the statement, as is proved by the procedures of exclusion and the mechanisms of rejection that come into action when a speaking subject has formulated one or several unassimilable statements. Doctrine also puts the statements in question on the basis of the speaking subject, as the doctrine always stands as the sign, manifestation and instrument of a prior adherence to a class, social status, race, nationality, interest and so on. Doctrine binds individuals to certain types of enunciation and forbids them all others, but it also uses certain types of enunciation to bind individuals amongst themselves and differentiates them by that very fact from all others. Doctrine can be seen as a double subjection of the speaking subjects to discourses and of discourses to the group of speaking individuals. (Foucault, 1981, 63-64.)

When it comes to discourses surrounding memory policies, the starting point would be to recognize what kind of discourse is allowed and who has the right to enter it with the right kind of statements. The order of discourse consists of foundation, outside and inside. The Foucauldian discourse analysis offers good tools in this, as it can be assessed on the outset whether some statements are excluded from the discourse. This naturally raises the question “why” and is a good indicator of what kind of memories are preferred in a state. Just like social constructivism denies that any state of affairs is inevitable, this approach also focuses on the conscious effort to control discourses. Once it is established what kind of statements are allowed to enter the discourse concerning memory, the next step is to look into the internal control procedures. Have some texts have been granted primacy, to which others make commentaries? What kind of authors can be found? Are some restrictions imposed on speaking subjects? Are there some prerequisites for those who can make statements concerning memory, and are they based on merit (like being a respected historian), or something else (right kind of political affiliation for example)?

3.7. Post-truth – When facts do not matter

Discourses concerning history have been traditionally based on established facts, and in theory historians and other people with extensive knowledge on the subject should be the ones whose opinion weighs the most. However, this is not always the case as memory is often used in order

to support certain readings of history, and this can lead to a situation where it matters more whether the right things are said in a statement, not their factual correctness. If the facts are inconvenient, when trying to impose a certain reading of history and promoting selectively memories while forgetting others, they can be set aside. In the worst case this can lead to a situation where opinions and facts are all equated, and those who are able to enter the discourse can be anybody with the right things to say, not the ones that have actual knowledge. This is known as “post-truth, that will be explained in more detail in this sub-chapter. It is also important when discussing memory policies since memory is related to history. Facts should matter, but if they do not support certain goals, facts can be ignored, belittled or even prohibited.

“Post-truth” can be understood as a phenomenon, where one can say what feels true to oneself, and one person’s opinion is as good as another’s. It usually leads to everything being subjective. This is usually backed with the justification that scientific claims made at one point have been disproven or withdrawn in a later era. In this kind of thinking revisionism has not only entered scientific field, but other fields could be revised or altered as well, such like historical facts. The core idea is that historical circumstances and current-day experiences call into question that absolute facts even exist. However, this is not a correct understanding, as there are plenty of plain and unequivocal facts, which should not be assimilated with judgments about them. Whereas facts about historical events are settled, theories and judgments concerning them can be mutable, and this can change as some take a different view on these matters, as the scale of values change. It is part of the human nature to stick to one’s inner conviction, even if facts contradict it. When people become attached to a narrative, it can change their perception, or even recollection of events. If the basic knowledge of facts is disturbed, so is the very distinction that supports the concepts of truth and facticity, and just as importantly the contrary notions of falsity and fake knowledge. (McFarlane, 2018, 189-199)

A functioning democracy relies on well-informed public, and if people are misinformed on a large scale, there is a greater chance that societal decisions will be suboptimal. Presence of misinformation can cause people to stop believing in facts altogether, and especially conspiracy theories as a form of misinformation can make people less likely to accept official information, even if such theories are dismissed. Therefore, misinformation has broader implications than just misinformed citizens: it concerns the overall intellectual well-being of a society. This can lead to a situation where a large share of the population has abandoned conventional criteria of evidence, internal consistency and fact-seeking. Just like misinformation is not supposed to be an alternative knowledge claim, post-truth claims do not seek to establish a coherent model of

reality, but to erode trust in facts and reality to the point where facts no longer matter or are even acknowledged to exist. The post-truth world empowers people to choose their own reality, in which facts and objective evidence are trumped by existing beliefs and prejudices. This can further be amplified by leaders, who model deception and delusion as adequate means to gather support, and falsifying reality is consequently not only about changing people's beliefs, but about asserting power. In such a world there can be departures from long-standing beliefs and principles, and it can become permissible to believe whatever one wants if contrary evidence fails to find traction. This can lead to a situation where people believe that their beliefs are widely shared irrespective of whether or not they actually are. (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017, 353-362)

The relationship of speaking the truth and equal right of speech for everybody was discussed by Michel Foucault on his lecture series titled "*Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia*" given in the University of California in 1983. *Parrhesia* was a term used in Greek literature first time by Euripides around 400 BC, and it translates as "to say everything". Foucault sees that the one speaking in this manner has no doubts about possessing the truth. In addition to speaking the truth, *parrhesia* involves a possibility of danger, as telling the truth is not always a safe choice. Even if one does not necessarily risk one's life, there still is a risk involved. For example, in politics this could mean losing one's popularity or creating a political scandal for being of an opinion against the majority or ruling instances. This is not to be confused with another Greek term *isegoria*, which was an Athenian right of equal speech, that was different from *parrhesia* in the sense that such speech would claim to be true for rhetorical purposes or in order to please the audience, whereas *parrhesia* did not necessarily aim to do that. (Foucault, 1983, 7-28) The post-truth culture appears to be arising from the fundamental constellation of power and knowledge that defines democracy as such, even in its most distant forms. It both enables the continuous generation of discourses of truth that it relies on, and exposes them to confrontation and conflict with opinions, that do not have the status of truth, but have an equal right to be expressed. This post-truth constellation taking place in the current society could be seen as *isegoria* taking over *parrhesia* in the sense that truth as such is devalued. If all truth is reduced to opinion, which can be neither true nor false, contesting them is meaningless in the end. Consequently, authoritative regimes and movements tend to advocate the equivalence of all opinions. If politics is devoid of truth, then all that is left is power that can be exercised without any limitation, and if all opinions are as good as the other, it might as well be the opinion of those in power. (Prozorov, 2018, 26-30)

4. MEMORY POLITICS IN RUSSIA

History has an important role in nation building, as it can be a great source of pride to the national sentiment, or a source shame on the other hand. Like Benedict Anderson pointed out, it is common that people forget about the tragedies of their own nation and they do not need to be constantly reminded of them by the state either. These so-called “characteristic amnesias” create narratives, that support more positive interpretations of the nation’s history. For narrative purposes, the “own deaths” of the nation are left out, these meaning deaths caused by the state in relation to its own people. In Russia the memory of Stalinist repressions is such a memory, as it is not commemorated widely, and Stalin’s qualities as a great military leader are preferred over his role in the killings of Soviet population. People are not reminded about these purges, like they are about World War II. The narrative of Soviet people uniting against an external fascist threat could not be further away from the fact that in the 1930’s people were killed by their own state regardless of whether they were guilty or not. The memory of World War II is important in legitimizing Russian state institutions and the patriotism that people share.

In order to understand Sandarmokh better, first it must be discussed how these two historical memories are treated in contemporary Russia and what kind of policies are conducted in relation to them. This chapter serves to provide a domestic national context, against which it is easier to comprehend what is taking place concerning this mass grave. The political repressions were internal violence targeted indiscriminately against the Soviet people, and in Sandarmokh citizens were executed by their fellow countrymen. This memory is much like Anderson understood as “forgotten as our own”, since it is not discussed or commemorated to a great extent in the Russian society. Its scarce and modest commemoration sites are nothing compared to the glorification of World War II, which provides Russia with an honorable and heroic past. This can be seen as a state-supported memory, which has an important function in legitimizing current policies, both domestic and foreign. It can thus be established, that in Russia the history of 20th century history is interpreted through events, that entail glory and heroism. In this reading of history all that reminds about Stalinist repressions are inconvenient.

4.1. A Tale of two historical epochs

In today’s Russia the attitudes towards Stalinist repressions and World War II are very different. *Levada Analytical Center* is a Russian non-governmental research organization, that conducts regularly sociological surveys, for example regarding public opinion towards different societal phenomena. In 2017 *Levada* published a research on public opinion towards Stalinist

repressions, where the respondents were asked different questions regarding Stalin and the political repressions of the 1930's during a ten-year period between 2007 and 2017. The conductors of the survey concluded that the attitudes towards Stalin can be described with duality and inconsistency, which reflects the structure of the post-Soviet "doublethink". In the collective memory there are some traces left of the irrationalism of the Stalinist terror from 1930's to 1950's, but during the recent years mainly due to the apologetic attitudes towards Stalin's actions, he has become more known as one of the symbols of a great country and the victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War. The conductors see that this kind of historical amnesia is facilitated by the ambiguous memory policy of the Russian leadership, that combines the mythologization of the Soviet past, with a hidden justification of crimes committed by the state, or at least, with the desire to downplay their significance and scale. They also state that the inability to give a moral and political assessment of the activities and personality of Stalin itself is connected with the absence of authoritative figures in society and even social positions from which past assessments could be made, and also with the insignificance of the intellectual and scientific elite for the public opinion.⁵

There were some questions in the survey that portray a significant decrease in negative attitudes towards Stalin. The conductors asked the respondents whether they agree with various statements regarding Stalinist repressions that they were presented with. One of the statements was "they (the Stalinist repressions) were a political crime, and there can be no justification for them" (*Это было политическое преступление, и ему не может быть оправдания*). In 2007 72 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, whereas in 2017 this number had decreased to 39 percent. At the same time, the number of respondents agreeing with the statement "it was a political necessity, they were historically justified" (*Это была политическая необходимость, они исторически оправданы*) had increased from 9 percent to 25 percent during the same ten-year period. The conductors think that this is due to the younger respondents, who are imposed with TV programs presenting apologetic sentiments towards Stalin. This can further be demonstrated with responses to the question on how the respondents would react if a memorial for Stalin was erected for the celebration of victory. From 2005 to 2015 the number of people, who responded having no stance one way or another (*Безразлично*) was steadily around 28-30 percent, whereas the number of those who would react to it rather positively (*Скорее, положительно*) had increased from 18 percent to 28

⁵ Левада-Центр: БОЛЬШОЙ ТЕРРОР И РЕПРЕССИИ, 07.09.2017 <https://www.levada.ru/2017/09/07/16561/>

percent and the number of those who would have solely a negative reaction to this (*Целиком отрицательно*) had decreased from 18 to 9 percent during this same ten-year period.⁶

After the collapse of the USSR the critical evaluation of the Soviet history was short-lived. Under Boris Yeltsin's term the government was not strong enough to sustain politics of memory, and it drew its legitimacy from project of the future. The consolidation of power that followed after Putin's rise to power allowed the creation of a systematic politics of the past, that was forcefully promoted by the state-controlled media. The opening of the Soviet archives was slowed down, and some collections were closed again. The government also meddled with the content of school textbooks and created an industry of television documentaries and historical dramas featuring Soviet history. In this so-called televised history Stalin's terror was trivialized and the state and its agencies were glorified, especially the army and secret services. In these circumstances the regime's ideologists turned their focus on World War II. This can be described as a "cult of war", and it has a peculiar relationship with Stalin: it is both pro-Stalinist (the war was won thanks to Stalin) and anti-Stalinist (the war was won despite Stalin's mistakes and repressions) at the same time. As the question of Stalinism's legacy is a dividing question in Russian society, this approach accommodates holders of both views. (Koposov, 2018, 238-248)

Levada Center has also mapped opinions and attitudes towards World War II and Victory Day celebrations, that are organized annually on 9th of May, the date on which Nazi Germany surrendered in 1945. As their survey conducted in 2019 demonstrated, out of the respondents 76 percent answered, that they will watch the TV broadcast of the Victory Day parade organized in Moscow. Also, 33 percent of the respondents answered that they will participate in an event known as "Immortal regiment" (*Бессмертный полк*), where people parade with portraits of relatives who fought in World War II. In 2016 the number of such respondents was 20 percent.⁷ *Levada* conducted another survey in 2019 on what events and phenomena cause Russians to feel proud of their country. The biggest number (53 percent) responded to the question "What is the primary thought that connects you to your nation?" (*Что в первую очередь связывается у Вас с мыслью о вашем народе?*) to be "Our past, our history" (*Наше прошлое, наша история*). In the same survey respondents were asked, what event in the history of their country makes them proudest (*Какие события и явления в истории нашей страны вызывают у Вас чувство гордости?*), and 87 percent of the respondents responded

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Левада-Центр: ДЕНЬ ПОБЕДЫ, 30.04.2019 <https://www.levada.ru/2019/04/30/den-pobedy-3/>

this to be “the victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.”⁸ Thus, it is no surprise, that Victory Day is a big celebration in Russia and strongly promoted by the government.

Victory Day is an annual national celebration and a holiday, that is celebrated all over Russia and especially in Moscow, where a grandiose parade is organized, and leaders from all over the world are invited to celebrate the end of World War II. There are some traditions characteristic to these celebrations, and they can be divided into familiar identification, civil solidarity or symbolic aggression. Familiar identification means that people try to identify with the generation that fought in the war by using similar clothes like soldiers, especially a soldier’s hat called *pilotka* is a common sight. Also, the aforementioned Immortal regiment can be seen as similar activity. Civil solidarity means carrying or presenting symbols that are related to war commemoration, like wearing the orange-black Ribbon of Saint George (*георгиевская лента*) in clothing or hanging it to a car antenna, or it could be using a bumper sticker that says “Thanks grandfather for the victory!” (*Спасибо деду за победу!*). Symbolic aggression differentiates from the aforementioned symbols, that create solidarity with one’s own people (us), because they recreate the war-time slogans directed at the enemy (the other). Such examples are bumper stickers with slogans like “To Berlin!” (*На Берлин!*) or “Russians are on the move!” (*Русские идут!*) They can also include symbolic humiliation, like a popular slogan that is popular among Russian nationalists “1941-1945. We can do it again” (*Можем повторить*). (Arkhipova et al, 2017, 84-102)

The official state-imposed memory of the war that is enshrined in films, songs, monuments and parades has dismissed the personal memories of those who actually fought in the war. As most people, who personally experienced the horrors of the war are either dead or very old, what is left of the war is kept alive by people who have no personal recollection of those times. Whereas for the older generations Victory Day was a day of sorrow and tears, for most people nowadays it is a traditional happy celebration with its rituals, just like decorating a tree for New Year’s celebrations or preparing pancakes for Maslenitsa. (Golovashina, 2017, 6-10) The symbolism of victory is at the core of explaining why this war commemoration of mythical proportions is so powerful. Putin’s administration has chosen this historical event as the central historical event of the twentieth century, as it underlines the unity and coherence of the nation, gives it legitimacy and status as a world power. It works like a myth is supposed to, as it creates a moment that is simultaneously timeless and rooted in time, it involves suffering and

⁸ Левада-Центр: НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ И ГОРДОСТЬ, 17.01.2019
<https://www.levada.ru/2019/01/17/natsionalnaya-identichnost-i-gordost/>

redemption, trauma and recovery from it and a narrative way to understand Russia's challenges. It includes a collective sense of belonging, redemption and is appealing due to its iconicity both as a paradigm of suffering and as one of victory. (Wood, 2011, 172-175)

This so-called cult of war has thus been an effective myth, as sociological surveys show how 70 to 80 percent of respondents agree that the victory over Nazi Germany was the most important event in the history of twentieth century and that Victory Day is even more important holiday than New Year's Eve. One obvious reason is that the 1990's following the collapse of the Soviet Union were seen as a beginning of a period of national humiliation and misery. The cult of Great Patriotic War thus emerged as a foundation myth of a post-Soviet Russia that would establish continuity with the glorious Soviet history. The myth of World War II is not a new phenomenon in Russia, but under Putin's presidency its implications have changed. Whereas during the Soviet times the war was won due to "advantages of socialism" and the "leading role of the Communist Party", in modern Russia the dominant themes of this myth are patriotism and leadership of the state. Even though the atrocities committed by the Soviet army and secret services are not a secret and are discussed in history writing, this myth of cult of war excludes certain accusations against the Soviet Union. The key idea in this cult is that the state and its people are one, and this obliterates the memory of Stalinist repressions. It paints the Russian people as victims of foreign aggression, not the victims of state-sponsored terror against its own people. This has a strong mobilizing potential: it revitalizes Stalin's formula of "whoever is against communism, is for fascism". It has now turned to be that "who is against Russia, is a fascist." In this myth Russians are Hitler's main victims, not Jews, and the Holocaust is left out of the myth for this reason. (Koposov, 2018, 248-250)

There is also a significant difference on how Stalinist terror and World War II are commemorated in modern Russian society. Some victims of the Stalinist repressions were rehabilitated, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union no de-Sovietization policies took place that would have put in trial those Soviet officials and executioners responsible for the acts of killing. No professional ban was ever instated for former leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, like was done regarding former Nazi officers in Germany. In modern-day Russia, the most important monument to the millions of victims of the Soviet regime is still Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's book *The Gulag Archipelago*. This is because of the absence of widespread monuments to Stalinist repressions, and therefore the most important forms of cultural memory belong to the textual domain. In Russia it is difficult to find a monument, a cemetery or a museum devoted to the memory of Soviet terror. The databases of the Memorial Society list

five hundred monuments, plaques and commemorative inscriptions at various sites of the Soviet terror, whereas the GULAG system comprised of about four hundred fully developed camps. This kind of memorialization is inadequate both in scale and in quality. At only two of the GULAG sites, in Solovki and Perm, there are small museums that show the conditions in the camps, the torture techniques, the documents and the portraits. The most important monuments are not erected on the sites of the former camps, but near them. The memorials for Soviet terror tend to be small, inconspicuous and do not usually say in more detail who were the victims or perpetrators. By erecting monuments to their former victims, society and the state seek to disrupt their continuity from those who were their murderers. In Russia, this work is mostly still to be done in a greater scale when it comes to Stalinist repressions. (Etkind, 2004, 42-57)

A more recent proof of this tendency to keep down the memories of Stalinist terror was from 2018, when a researcher from Russia's GULAG History Museum stated that a secret Moscow directive from 2014 ordered the destruction of some of the last remaining documents on Soviet-era prisoners. Case files of GULAG prisoners were often destroyed, but their personal data was kept on registration cards, which are still held by the police and intelligence agencies. The disclosed classified order subsequently instructed Russian officials of those agencies to destroy the registration cards of prisoners who had reached the age of 80, which includes almost all of them.⁹ A similar trend has taken place in Nazran, the capital of the Republic of Ingushetia in the Northern Caucasus region, where a memorial consisting of nine towers was originally erected to commemorate the Chechen and Ingush victims of political repressions and mass deportations of 1944. During the past decade new monuments have been built to this memorial site to commemorate military heroes of World War I and World War II and liquidators of the Chernobyl disaster of Ingush origin. The attention is not anymore solely on the victims of political repressions, but also in the heroes of the Soviet era.¹⁰

When it comes to commemoration of World War II, the whole setting is completely opposite. Its roots are traced back to the Soviet control of history, that included renaming things such as streets and cities, events and festivals and much commemorative building. In addition to erecting statues of Lenin in every town of the Soviet Union, the Great Patriotic War provided the most important images since the 1960's. Not only is the war genuinely sacred for whole

⁹ RFE: Gulag Museum Says Moscow Ordered 'Catastrophic' Destruction of Documents. 9.6.2018 <https://www.rferl.org/a/gilag-history-museum-says-moscow-ordered-catastrophic-destruction-prisoner-records/29281003.html>

¹⁰ Daria Khlevnyuk: Stalin's continuing, disputed legacy. 17.8.2018. <https://www.eurozine.com/stalins-continuing-disputed-legacy/#>

generations, but it also became a convenient distraction from economic and political stagnation of the Soviet era, especially during Leonid Brezhnev's rule when war memorials became even more grotesque. One good example of this is the extravagant Victory Park in Moscow, that took so long to be completed that that the Soviet Union had collapsed before it opened. After the collapse of the Soviet Union only a few war memorials have been removed or changed in Russia, unlike many other images from Soviet past. People still bring flowers to war memorials and young couples stand in front of them to be photographed for their wedding day. (Merridale, 2003, 16-28) Currently there are over 20 thousand memorials for the Great Patriotic War in Russia, the most popular probably being the "Motherland is Calling!" (*Родина-мать зовёт!*) statue in Volgograd and the Victory Park complex of Moscow located in Poklonnaya gora. These war memorials tend to be monumental in their nature and they always portray the Soviet nation as heroes and winners. The building of memorial complexes that include an eternal flame (a fire, that is always burning in front of the monument) coincided with the urbanization and building of cities after the war, and war memorials were usually built to visible spots in the main squares of cities. (Golovashina, 2017, 3-4)

4.2. Make Soviet Union great again?

In present-day Russia, there is a peculiar genre of neo-Stalinist literature. What is descriptive of them, is that they tend to be written in a semi-fictionalized form, so presented arguments are not always supported by scholarly references. Such literature challenges facts and interpretations shared by the world academic community when it comes to different historical facts, like the costs of Soviet modernization, the scale of mass repressions under Stalin, or if they even took place, the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states during World War II and even the cause of Stalin's death. The goal in these books is to debunk lies of liberal historians, who denigrate the Stalinist period of Soviet history and to restore Stalin's good name. The books are usually titled in a non-neutral manner, like *The Great War Slandered-2: Nothing for Us to Repent* by Igor Pykhalov and Aleksandr Diukov or *We Should Be proud, Not Sorry* by Yuri Zhukov. (Chapkovski, 2017, 189-194) Even though these kinds of writers are somewhat of a fringe phenomenon, in the wider society there has also been attempts at defending Stalin's legacy. For example, in 2007 the Kremlin promoted a new history textbook (the so-called "Filippov-textbook") for upper-grade students, which stated that the means of mass repression under Stalin were justified by the preparation for war with Germany. This so-called preventive repression was needed in transforming the country into an industrial power that would face the threat of war in the very near future. This interpretation of history faced a lot of criticism, and

the Kremlin also distanced itself from it and approved another book for the use of 10th graders about the controversies of 20th-21st centuries. This book did not justify Stalin's actions per se, but it also failed to offer an explicit moral judgment of the Soviet era. (Sherlock, 2015, 45-59)

One interesting shift towards the glorification of the Soviet past in more general terms can be found in the current Russian anthem, which has the same melody as the Soviet anthem from 1944 to 1991 known as "*Unbreakable Union*". Its melody is originally from Aleksandr Aleksandrov's "*The Anthem of the Bolshevik Party*", and its lyrics were written by Sergei Mikhalkov. This anthem came out during World War II, and its aim was to inspire the citizens of a war-torn country and to celebrate important Soviet military victories. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian national anthem was changed to Mikhail Glinka's "*Patriotic Song*", that was the official state anthem from 1991 to 2000. When Vladimir Putin rose to power in 2000, he established a government commission in the same year to examine a new alternative to the Glinka anthem, as it had gained criticism for not having any lyrics and in general was not very liked by the public. Putin made it known that he preferred Aleksandrov's melody over other proposals, and the commission ended up recommending reinstating this melody for the "new" national anthem. This change was made official in December 2000 and the lyrics for the anthem were written by the very Mikhalkov behind "*Unbreakable Union*". The new lyrics replaced Lenin and references to Communism with an anthropomorphized country, "*Russia, our holy power*" that was addressed with the familiar second person pronoun "ty". (Daughtry, 2003, 42-55)

Leading up to this, there was a lot of debate for and against the anthem among Russian politicians. For example, Boris Nemtsov from the Union of Right Forces Party (*Союз правых сил*) stated that the president had made a "*large-scale mistake*", which will "*cause extremely unpleasant consequences for the country and a split in the society.*" He concluded that the anthem is not a national, but a Stalinist anthem and that "*when this hymn is heard, many will not only refrain from singing, but from standing up altogether.*"¹¹ On the contrary, President Putin stated in November 2000 that "*I do not rule out that the people, including ourselves, are wrong. But I would like to appeal to those who disagree with this decision. I urge you not to dramatise events, not to erect insuperable barriers, not to burn bridges and split society again. If we agree that the symbols of earlier epochs, including the Soviet era, cannot be used, we would have to admit that a whole generation of our fellow citizens, our mothers and fathers,*

¹¹ Newsru.com: Борис Немцов считает, что президент совершил "крупномасштабную ошибку" (4.12. 2000) <https://www.newsru.com/russia/04dec2000/nemzov.html>

have lived useless and meaningless lives, that they have lived in vain. I cannot agree with that in my heart.”¹² Among the Russian cultural intelligentsia, the response to using Aleksandrov’s melody was much more unified. The reinstatement was seen as a step towards Soviet revanchism and as an insult to those who suffered under the Soviet regime. It was argued that even if the lyrics were altered, the music in itself is firmly attached to the words that glorify Lenin and Stalin. The melody was seen as “music of totalitarianism”, that symbolizes an epoch of violence and terror. (Daughtry, 2003, 57)

4.3. Choose your side – Russia vs. others in interpreting World War II

“The myth of the war has provided an explanatory framework within which the Russian state and people present as an unbreakable unity, while all anti-Russian forces are categorized as “Nazi allies” or the equivalent. The memory law of 2014 therefore had a twofold goal: to mobilize support for the regime within the country and to legitimize Russia’s aggression against Ukraine by presenting it as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War.” (Nikolay Koposov on his book *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, 2018, 207)

Unlike the memory of Second World War, Stalin and his legacy are not treated as uncritically or promoted. The approach over the years in Russia to Stalin, excluding his role in the Second World War, could be described as indifferent. Even though there are some positive assessments of the Soviet period like adopting the melody of the Soviet national anthem and emphasizing the historical continuity of the Russian state through the Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods, there has been no coherent assessment of this era one way or another. It lacks thematic focus and internal cohesion. At the same time the Kremlin honors the memory of Soviet dissidents like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn and employs Soviet-era symbols. Putin and other Russian politicians have condemned Stalinist repressions, but there are obstacles to wide-ranging examination of Stalinism. Firstly, if this era were scrutinized, it could provide a powerful justification for contemporary democratization. But most importantly, the reason lies in World War II. The understanding of this war has been an ongoing dispute between European post-Communist states and Russia, as there has been no condemnation of the Soviet repression in Eastern Europe from the Russian side. The narrative about the heroic Great Patriotic War is not accepted in many post-Soviet states, and also the understanding of the Nazi-Soviet pact and framing the origins of World War II are not agreed upon. Russia has never accepted that the Soviet Union was a complicit in starting the war or accepted any other understandings of the

¹² Vladimir Putin’s speech on December 4th, 2000 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21137>

Soviet victory but a triumph. Other contentious issues, like the forced incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union in 1940 are left unaddressed. Therefore, it is hard for Russians to disentangle the memory of Stalin from the existential struggle of the war. Stalin is respected, while recognizing the brutality of his regime. (Sherlock, 2011, 93-104)

This dispute over the historical interpretation of World War II has mostly caused just arguments between Russian and other heads of states, but in 2007 such dispute escalated into a riot in Estonia during the “Bronze Soldier” affair. The monument in question was erected in Tallinn, the capital of the Soviet-occupied Estonia, in 1947 and was originally known as a memorial for the “Liberators of Tallinn”. It commemorated the Red Army soldiers, who conquered the city three years earlier and portrayed an anonymous soldier in a specific and recognizable uniform. For Estonians, the statue represented their national tragedy of occupations and forced deportations, but for ethnic Russians, who constitute a considerable population in Tallinn, the monument was a central site for the Victory Day celebrations. In 2007 the Estonian authorities decided to relocate the monument to a military cemetery on the outskirts of the city from its original location nearby the city center. A crowd of mostly Russian-speaking people gathered to protest the relocation, and this escalated into vandalism and looting. Before the relocation, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned against any attempts to transfer the monument, as it condemned any actions that deny the incomparable price that Russia paid in its victory over fascism. The foreign minister of Russia Sergei Lavrov sent a letter to “Western partners of Estonia”, where he accused Estonia of rewriting history and downplaying the role of Russia in liberating the world from fascism. Things escalated further when a Russian youth movement called *Nashi* (Ours) arranged a demonstration outside the Estonian embassy in Moscow wearing Red Army uniforms and sleeping in tents. Estonia accused that the protesters had been paid by the Kremlin. (Lehti et al., 2008, 393-402)

In general, many Eastern European post-Communist countries in addition to Estonia, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Lithuania or Latvia have adopted more anti-Russian politics of memory, that equate Communism with Nazism. Memories of such traumatic events committed by the Soviets like the Katyn massacre for the Polish or the Holodomor for the Ukrainians are naturally behind this, in part also nationalistic policies that many Eastern European countries have pursued after the collapse of Communism, and finally this has been escalated by Putin’s regime’s promotion the Soviet myth of war. In many Eastern European countries different de-Communization laws have been adapted, such as the Prague Declaration

of 2008, that called for treating Communist crimes like Nazi crimes, and prohibiting their denial similarly like Holocaust negationism has been. (Koposov, 2018, 133–160)

This has created backlash from Russia that is against equating Soviet policies with Nazism. President Putin was asked in an international conference in Valdai in October 2019 whether he sees that Stalin and Hitler started World War II together. Putin answered: *“I don’t want to give you an overview of Stalin’s regime, you know about the repressions, about the camps, about the losses that we suffered during those repressions. That is a very dark page in the history of our country. But to say that Stalin started the war, this is highly cynical to say as if the Soviet Union attacked Germany at 4 a.m. on June 22 and not vice versa.”*¹³ Another example of Russia arguing over Soviet history is its ongoing debate with Poland about World War II when it comes to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Katyn massacre or the actions of the Red Army after it took over Warsaw in 1945. Both sides blame each other for rewriting history, and one of the latest clashes was in January 2020, when on the anniversary of the Red Army’s liberation of Warsaw, Russian officials held a fireworks display over Moscow. This sparked criticism from the Polish Embassy in Russia, which posted on Twitter that *“The Red army liberated Warsaw from the Nazis but did not bring freedom to Poles”*.¹⁴

The protection of the heroic Soviet war memory is also enshrined in Russian legislation. The best example of this is so-called Yarovaya Law (named after a Russian politician Irina Yarovaya, one of its initiators), officially known as the “Law against the Rehabilitation of Nazism” or Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which was signed into law in May 2014 by President Putin. The law makes it a criminal offense: *“to deny facts recognized by the international military tribunal that judged and punished the major war criminals of the European Axis countries, to approve of the crimes this tribunal judged, and to spread intentionally false information about the Soviet Union’s activities during World War II.”* It also criminalized *“the spreading of information on military and memorial commemorative dates related to Russia’s defense that is clearly disrespectful of society, and to publicly desecrate symbols of Russia’s military glory.”* Under the law this is punishable by a fine of up to 300 000 rubles or three years in jail. The punishment is harsher if a state official commits the offense. This law can be explained through some factors. One of the main reasons

¹³ Ruptly’s Youtube channel: LIVE: Putin attends Valdai discussion club plenary meeting (ENG) https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10227&v=EKwM6lZZDgc&feature=emb_title , October 3 2019 (from 2:50:00 onwards)

¹⁴ Radio Free Europe: Memory Wars: Polish, Russian Fight Over World War II Shifts To Auschwitz, January 20, 2020 <https://www.rferl.org/a/memory-wars-polish-and-russian-fight-over-world-war-ii-shifts-to-auschwitz/30386948.html>

is the use of memory of World War II and its symbolism that has already been discussed in detail. It also represents the Russian parliament's conservative-traditionalist turn, as traditional values are preferred and the proliferation of modern fashions are to be halted, and the law reminds the public of the existence of absolute evil and punishes its rehabilitation. Finally, the law entered into force coincidentally with the annexation of Crimea, and the law assisted the propaganda campaign of labeling Ukrainian national movement as "Nazis" or "fascist" and justifying defending the Crimean population against these attacks and seizing the area.¹⁵ The law can be seen as a direct outcome of the Ukrainian crisis and in a broader sense of Putin's politics of memory, which was crucial to his project of neo-imperial reconstruction. (Koposov, 2018, 207)

This legislation has already been used in court proceedings. An example of this is the case of Vladimir Luzgin, a Russian blogger. In 2016 he was convicted in the Perm Regional Court of publishing an article that was seen as "*intentionally disseminating false information about the USSR's involvement in World War II by publishing an article that alleged that communists cooperated with Nazi Germany to invade Poland*". The court argued that Luzgin was educated enough to know that the article contained false information and its publication might have contributed to the rehabilitation of Nazi ideology. He was fined 200 000 rubles (approximately around 3000 euros). Luzgin shared an article on a popular Russian social media platform *Vkontakte*, that discussed a Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera and his Communist followers and stated that they cooperated with Nazi Germany to jointly attack Poland, leading to World War II. The act of sharing the article online was equated by the court to the act of public communication targeting persons who share Luzgin's alleged anti-government opinions and nationalist ideologies. When reviewing the content of the article, the court relied on expert testimony concluding that the article contained false information about the Soviet Union during World War II, especially the references to "Communists" in the article were seen to be linked to the Soviet Union and thus accused them of cooperating with Nazi Germany.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kurilla, I: The Implications of Russia's Law against the "Rehabilitation of Nazism". PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 331, August 2014 http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Peppm331_Kurilla_August2014_0.pdf

¹⁶ Columbia Global Freedom of Expression: The Case of Vladimir Luzgin <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/case-vladimir-luzgin/>

4.4. The never-ending war

<i>“Мы ведем войну уже семьдесят лет,</i>	<i>“We fought this war for seventy years</i>
<i>Нас учили, что жизнь - это бой,</i>	<i>We were taught that life is a fight</i>
<i>Но по новым данным разведки</i>	<i>But the intelligence has just reported</i>
<i>Мы воевали сами с собой.”</i>	<i>We fought ourselves all this time”</i>

(Аквариум- Поезд в огне, Akvarium – The Train is on Fire, 1988)

It seems that in Russia the memory of World War II has been turned into one of the defining key features of Russian national identity. It is commemorated through official annual celebrations; its memory is enshrined in endless memorials and its interpretation is imposed and controlled by the state. It divides people into those who support it (us) and those who do not (others). Inside Russia people challenging this point of view can face legal consequences, and other countries that do not share similar understanding of World War II can be labeled as “Nazis” or “anti-Russians”, or even domestic policies of other countries can be indirectly interfered as the Bronze Soldier case demonstrates. Against such a regulated official narrative, the memory of Stalinist repressions is left rather undiscussed, or as Renan would say “forgotten as our own”. It is such a painful memory of state-led violence against its own population, killing without any noble aim. It cannot be used in building any heroic narratives. Both the Russian state and public are indifferent towards it, as can be seen from comments made by Russian politicians or surveys conducted on public opinion. President Putin, who on the one hand does admit that the Stalinist repressions were a dark period in the country’s history, condemns all attempts to equate communism with Nazism and defends Stalin against foreign accusations. Stalin is seen as great military leader, and many Russians want to remember him as that, not as an initiator of political purges. Stalin is so tied to World War II and its myth, that his actions before the war are rather forgotten or set aside and anything that is related to the war are not to be criticized.

World War II is such an overwhelming narrative in Russia, that its monuments can be found in Russian towns or cities from the border of Finland all the way to the Asian Far East. If one is to use Aleksandr Etkind’s categorization of hard and soft memories and their interplay, there is

a clear difference between the memories of Stalinist repressions and World War II. The Stalinist terror is mainly a soft memory, which is left to the literal sphere and is commemorated in an inconspicuous and modest manner, so it is accessible to those who are willing to look for small memorial sites or to read GULAG and other literature on the topic. The hard memory enshrined in memorials and monuments are quite much missing, so the memory of repressions does not have a strong foothold in collective memory.

On the other hand, World War II has a strong foothold in the collective memory, as it is enshrined in soft and hard memory. There are a lot of literature, tv shows, movies and countless memorials dedicated to it. Therefore, its memory is not at a risk of being forgotten, as one cannot avoid seeing World War II memorials in Russia or movies and tv shows on the topic. It is thus a very peculiar situation, where two historical memories, that are only few years apart from each other, are treated so very differently. World War II is just not going away from Russian society even 75 years after its ending, whereas the Stalinist terror has been facing a collective amnesia, and less and less people have personal experience regarding it anymore. As the song by Akvarium quoted above states, the war has been waged for decades, but the fight has been between “ourselves”. This could be applied to the current situation in Russia, where the narrative of heroic war against a foreign enemy has been used for almost 80 years to unite people and to justify policies. However, at the same there exists considerable reluctance to tackle historical period of internal violence, that cannot be assigned to any other instance than fellow countrymen.

4.5. Sandarmokh - At the crossroads of memories

What makes Sandarmokh a very interesting case study is that both these memories clash in this specific location. For a long time Sandarmokh represented the indiscriminate killings carried out in the 1930's, but during the past years the new theory about Finns killing Soviet prisoners, the excavations of Military Historical Society to locate their bodies, the actions against Memorial and the arrests of historians Dmitriev and Koltyrin have brought the memory of war there. It almost seems like the repressions are downplayed, whereas the excavations have received a lot of public attention. It is in accordance with the general trend taking place in Russia, where World War II is glorified and Stalin's role as a great military leader is preferred over his responsibility in the repressions. The return of Soviet imagery, more accepting attitudes towards Stalin and the significance of victory in the war are ways how this tendency manifests itself among the Russian population, as it does in Sandarmokh.

The memory that Sandarmokh represents is painful and it has no glorious reasons behind it. As was discussed earlier, the repressions were cruel, and victims were mostly chosen on an indiscriminatory basis. Many innocent people were killed belonging to different professions, societal classes and nationalities. The perpetrators and victims were of the same nationality; it was home-grown terror. Against this background World War II with its clear demarcation of enemies and heroes is a memory that is easier to use for political purposes. It emphasizes Russia's role in defeating Nazism and the great sacrifice that the Soviet people had to give. The point is not to belittle this, as the number of perished Soviet citizens (be it soldiers or civilians) was tremendous for any nation to suffer. However, the millions of lives that perished in the repressions are no less significant. What differentiates them, is that whereas those who died during the war died for a greater cause, the ones who died during the repressions died for nothing. Therefore, it is not surprising why the Military Historical Society wants to bring the heroic memory of World War II to Sandarmokh, as then it would not be solely a place to reminisce those who perished in the repressions. It is easier to reminisce soldiers killed by a foreign occupier than regular people by their own government. In a place like Sandarmokh this is well seen, when these two memories in a way have to compete, and also historians, politicians and other civic actors are torn against each other as they debate what really happened.

5. SANDARMOKH- WHERE STALINIST REPRESSIONS AND GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR MEET

This chapter discusses what has happened in Sandarmokh starting from 2016. The main reason why the site has become a center of attention both in Russia and abroad is that two historians have been imprisoned. In addition to this Memorial, the organization conducting research on political repressions, has also faced lots of legal difficulties as they have been declared to be so-called “foreign agents”. The chain of events is quite difficult to follow sometimes, but this chapter tries to go through it in chronological order as much as possible from 2016 to this date. Quotes are presented from both sides of historians on whether they support the hypothesis that Finns possibly executed Soviet prisoners during World War II.

5.1. Foreign agents of Memorial

International Historical Educational Charitable and Human Rights Society Memorial (or International Memorial) is a non-commercial organization that studies political repressions in the Soviet Union and in present-day Russia. It also promotes moral and legal rehabilitation of persons subjected to political repressions. The main aim of Memorial is to promote the development of civil society and democratic state excluding the possibility of return to totalitarianism, which is done by overcoming the totalitarian stereotypes and restoring historical truth and perpetuating the memory of victims of political repressions.¹⁷ The Karelian branch of Memorial is led by Yuri Dmitriev and its goal is to carry out work to safeguard the historical memory of repressions. The Karelian branch is best known for locating the Sandarmokh mass grave, and for publishing a book containing the names of the repressed people.¹⁸ Around the time when the debates on Sandarmokh started and Memorial was caught in the middle of it, the organization’s situation had also become more difficult from a legal point of view. The International Memorial was announced to be a “foreign agent” by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation in October 2016 and was added into a registry of politically active organizations that receive foreign funding. The Memorial Human Rights Center and the Memorial Information and Education Center were earlier classified as such foreign agents. Irina

¹⁷ International Memorial: What is International Memorial <https://www.memo.ru/en-us/memorial/mission-and-statute/>

¹⁸ Международный Мемориал: Карельский Мемориал <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/memorial/departments/petrozavodsk>

Sherbakova from Memorial told in an interview to *Meduza* that the organization was classified as a foreign agent due their criticism of this exact law and other statements criticizing the Russian authorities.¹⁹ By 2020, Memorial has been fined for violating the foreign agent law altogether on 21 separate occasion, and the total sum of the fines amounts to 4,2 million rubles (around 50 000 euros). The reason for the fines is that Memorial has not added the “foreign agent” label into its web page.²⁰

This legislation can be seen as a part of a bigger trend that started in Russia in the 2000’s, where authorities became concerned of foreign-funded NGO’s and wanted to regain control over the activities of such groups. They were considered to be harming Russian security interests and that their campaigns were seen as initiated by foreign intelligence services. The law can be considered as a result of policies to lessen foreign influence among politicians and public servants and to draw a clear line between Russian national identity and antagonistic Western values. The federal law “On Foreign Agents” was passed on July 2012 and it significantly constrained the financial, communication and administrative operations of NGO’s receiving foreign funding. In addition to foreign funding, another requirement is that such organizations have to engage in “political activity”, which is defined very broadly and covers almost all aspects of advocacy and human rights work. In addition to increasing administrative burdens to such NGO’s (mandating separate accounts for funds from local and foreign sources, different reports etc.), the law casts a shadow of distrust over them as the term “foreign agent” is associated in Russian political and popular discourses with spies and traitors. This effectively stigmatizes and ostracizes NGO’s with the classification of a foreign agent, thus making working for them in Russia quite difficult. (Orlova, 2019, 383-396)

Marina Agaltsova, a lawyer for Memorial Human Rights Center has noted, how the law on foreign agents leaves endless room for interpretation. Basically, if a person distributes information (even on social media) for the general public and receives any money from abroad, the requirements for being a foreign agent are fulfilled. The law does not require proof whether the information distributed is done so in the interests of the foreign principal. Therefore, the authorities can call anyone a foreign agent, even if they have the slightest contacts with international organizations or individuals, as well as Russian organizations that receive foreign

¹⁹ Meduza.io: «Международный мемориал» признали «иностранным агентом» 4.10.2016
<https://meduza.io/news/2016/10/04/mezhdunarodnyy-memorial-priznali-inostrannym-agentom>

²⁰ Правозащитный центр «Мемориал»: В первый рабочий день 2020 года сумма штрафов, назначенных «Мемориалу» по закону об иноагентах, превысила 4 млн рублей https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/v-pervyy-rabochiy-den-2020-goda-summa-shtrafov-naznachennyh-memorialu-po-zakonu-ob

funding. The law also requires, that all information coming from them must be labelled as originating from a foreign agent, which means that journalists must always indicate if they have interviewed persons falling under such category. If such labelling is not done, according to the law the publication must be taken down. If a foreign agent fails to mention about this status in its publications, it can be subjected to a fine or even administrative arrest for up to 15 days. Also, all foreign agents must establish a legal entity, which can be high-maintenance and requires reporting quarterly about its activities to the Ministry of Justice and conducting yearly audits to them.²¹

In the framework of Foucauldian discourse analysis, it can be argued that Memorial has been excluded from the general discussion in the Russian society, just like many other entities that have been labelled as foreign agents. It is a label, which carries with it very negative connotations, and such organizations must always mention that they are foreign agents and people who interview them have to always disclose this fact as well. Memorial and others are not excluded in the sense that their speech would be crazy, as Foucault had the division between reason and madness. Memorial is not factually wrong in its statements concerning Stalinist repressions, as their existence is not denied by the state either. However, Memorial's speech is treated as if it was crazy and not worth noting at all and deserves thus exclusion. It seems that the reason for their exclusion is that they are deemed to be "foreign", and thus have no place in discussing Russian history. One could just switch madness with foreign and oppose it with reason, because it is treated as something that does not deserve attention.

This is an absurd situation, because the whole definition of a foreign agent is arbitrary, and most organizations that have been labelled as such consist of Russians. Just like with Memorial, which is a Russian organization consisting of Russian people. If glancing through quickly, most people in the International Memorial Board are Russians (or at least have Russian surnames), and only few Polish or Czech-sounding names can be found and one possibly German.²² Similarly, the regional departments of Memorial seem to be headed by local people. So, the only thing that makes Memorial a foreign agent is that they receive funding outside of Russia, which apparently is enough to turn Russian people into foreigners that need to be singled out

²¹ Human Rights Center Memorial: Agents Everywhere: Why Almost Anyone Can Be Called a Foreign Agent Now <https://memohrc.org/en/blogs/agents-everywhere-why-almost-anyone-can-be-called-foreign-agent-now> 16.12.2019

²² International Memorial Board <https://www.memo.ru/en-us/memorial/international-memorial-board/>

and excluded. The next sub-chapter discusses in more detail what different historians said concerning Sandarmokh and based on what evidence.

5.2. Who killed who - Emerging theories about Sandarmokh

In 2016 a chain of events started unfolding, that put Sandarmokh into the center of attention in Russia and Finland. In June of that year an article by Yuri Kilin translated into Finnish was published in a newspaper “Kaleva” titled “A big proportion of POW’s died in the camps of the Continuation War” (*Iso osa sotavangeista kuoli jatkosodan leireillä*). Kilin is a professor at the Petrozavodsk State University. In the article he writes about Finnish prison camps for Soviet soldiers that were located in the Karelian Republic during the Finno-Russian Continuation War. According to him approximately 19 thousand out of 64 prisoners died in these camps, and that prisoners were treated harshly, suffered from malnutrition and were sometimes shot in an arbitrary fashion. He also mentions that hate towards Russians was one of the motivations for such treatment. Kilin states that the Finnish camps were “*probably among the worst in the world, possibly only Japanese and German camps were worse*”. He brought up the national movement in Russia, that strives to locate the graves of those who died for their Fatherland, and that the burial sites for Red Army soldiers who perished in Karelian concentration camps are not yet located. Kilin mentioned that Sandarmokh was a good location for sand extraction, so it must have been a familiar spot to Finnish authorities. Therefore, it would be logical, that some prisoners could have been buried in Sandarmokh. He urged that information is to be gathered from the national archives of Finland, from different Finnish sources and on sites that are known for accommodating mass burial sites near Medvezhegorsk. “*Sandarmokh is such a place*”, he concluded.²³

After this new theory started circulating in the Russian media, a chain of events started taking place that led to the arrest of two Karelian historians Yuri Dmitriev and Sergei Koltyrin and new excavations in Sandarmokh. These events will be discussed below in more detail, and they demonstrate quite well how the memories of Stalin’s political repressions and World War II meet in one concrete location. The imprisoned historians had during their long career uncovered the terrors inflicted by political repressions; Dmitriev as the head of Karelian Memorial and Koltyrin as a director of Medvezhegorsk City Museum. After the theories about executed Soviet prisoners emerged, the Russian Military Historical Society (*Российское военно-историческое общество*, which will henceforth be referred in the text with its Russian abbreviation RVIO)

²³ Kaleva: Iso osa sotavangeista kuoli jatkosodan leireillä. 3.7.2016

started in 2018 excavations in Sandarmokh in order to locate the remains of Soviet prisoners. Dmitriev was arrested before the excavations started and Koltyrin after the first set of excavations had been completed. Both these historians did not agree with the theory that Sandarmokh could have been a place for Finns to execute prisoners, and they were outspoken about this on the Russian media. Many consider their arrests to be directly related to this.

The opinions of the imprisoned historians were also shared by Anatoly Razumov, who is the director of the “*Vozvrashchennye imena*” (Center for Returned Names), which is an organization aiming to restore the rights of rehabilitated victims of political repressions. He noted in an interview with 7x7, how this follows a pattern of trying to shift blame away from crimes committed by Soviet instigators. For example, when the Katyn mass grave was found near Smolensk, the blame was moved to the Germans, or when the Bykovnya mass grave was found in near Kiev it was quickly explained that there was a German prison camp nearby and those are the instigators. Similarly, when the Kuropaty mass grave was found near Minsk, it was quickly explained away with blaming Germans as the shooters. This is happening with Sandarmokh, as Razumov notes: “*There are no Germans, but Finns.*” In the same interview representatives of Memorial expressed, that without a doubt the same will happen with Sandarmokh as did with Katyn: blurring of its name and shading the significance of the memorial as a place of historical memory of the Great Terror. This is done to also confuse people, present and especially future generations. It was also criticized how no representatives of Memorial were invited to the round-table discussion taking place in Petrozavodsk, even though they are the best experts of political repressions in Russia.²⁴

Sergey Verigin, a Russian historian from Petrozavodsk State University had a similar view as Kilin, as he states in the same interview conducted by 7x7 quoted above how Memorial has ignored the possibility that prisoners of war could be buried in Sandarmokh. He states that there were “some hundreds” executed prisoners, and Finns could have easily used the already existing infrastructure of the former NKVD camps. When asked about the numbers and to what documents they are based, Verigin says that they have the numbers verified but no concrete place. He said that one possible proof of this would be how Soviet prisoners helped Finns to build fortifications in Medvezhegorsk, as there was not enough Finns to do that. It cannot be said where all these prisoners went, so it could be proposed that they were shot. Verigin said that he does not cast a shadow over Sandarmokh as a burial site for political prisoners, but states

²⁴ 7x7, Анна Уарова: Переписать Сандармох <https://lr.7x7-journal.ru/sandarmokh/>

that “*We are only expressing the opinion that, possibly in these graves could be buried our prisoners of war. We have to carry out work, and if this hypothesis is confirmed, we will erect next to the memorial for victims of repressions a memorial for our prisoners of war.*” In the same interview with 7x7 Irina Fliege, one of the participants in the expedition that located the mass graves in Sandarmokh, stated that the documents concerning the site have been studied well, and not just once. She sees that there can be no doubt that it is a burial site for victims of repressions. “*They [Kilin and Verigin] do not provide any documents, so we cannot refute them. If there appears a document, then it can be studied and refuted, but to refute the existence of a document is generally unworthy.*” Fliege went on to say that the situation is a “*blizzard of information noise and the downgrading of Sandarmokh’s status.*”²⁵

5.3. “Ordered justice” – the arrests of Dmitriev and Koltyrin and the excavations in Sandarmokh

As the turmoil around Sandarmokh was gaining momentum in the autumn of 2016, the head of the Karelian Memorial and the discoverer of the mass grave Yuri Dmitriev found himself in a dire situation. He was arrested on December 13th, 2016 in Petrozavodsk and was charged with making pornographic images of his foster daughter. According to Dmitriev, these pictures were taken in order to document the child’s state of health, that was left it a frail health after being in an orphanage. In addition to accusations of using a minor for the purpose of producing pornographic materials or items, he was found guilty of an illegal possession of a firearm. On April 5th, 2018 Dmitriev was acquitted of all charges by the Petrozavodsk Municipal Court. However, the case was sent to further investigation and another charge was brought against him, in addition to the preceding accusations, of violent acts of a sexual nature towards an individual younger than 14 years of age. This led him to be taken again into custody on June 28th of the same year. Dmitriev has been in prison ever since that date. In July 2020 Dmitriev’s prison sentence was set to be three and half years, which would have meant that he was to be released in November of that same year, as he had already spent most of that time in imprisonment. However, the Supreme Court of Karelia toughened up Dmitriev’s sentence from three and half to thirteen years. This kind of decision was noted to be unusual even for Russian courts, and Memorial stated it to be cruel, illegal, wrong and politically motivated.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Meduza.io: Историку Юрию Дмитриеву резко ужесточили приговор — с 3,5 до 13 лет колонии строгого режима. Это беспрецедентно даже для российских судов. <https://meduza.io/feature/2020/09/29/istoriku-yuriyu-dmitrievu-rezko-uzhestochili-prigovor-s-3-5-do-13-let-kolonii-strogogo-rezhima-eto-bespretsedentno-dazhe-dlya-rossiyskih-sudov> 29.9.2020

The Russian opposition and its media outlets have as well discussed how the arrest had political implications and relate to a larger phenomenon of forgetting unpleasant facts. In an interview to news site *Meduza*, Nikita Petrov from Memorial said how it is certain that these accusations are related to Dmitriev's work on locating mass graves. According to him, it is hard to say whether behind this are authorities from Petrozavodsk or Moscow, but it is nevertheless some instance that is not satisfied with people talking about political repressions and these proceedings are a way to "settle scores" with Dmitriev.²⁷ Svetlana Aleksievich, a Belarusian writer and Nobel laureate in literature told in an interview to *Meduza*, including other supporters of Dmitriev, that the detention reminds of those conducted during Stalin's era, the same type of crimes that were brought to light by Dmitriev himself. According to Aleksievich he had become unwanted for those in power and had to be removed. In the same interview Vladimir Mirzoev said that people are "told to forget" by those people, who consider themselves to be "*heirs of NKVD*".²⁸

This sentiment of Dmitriev's arrest being orchestrated was shared by many others, and a group of over 200 people including many notable people from the Russian intelligentsia like Vladimir Pozner, Andrey Zvyagintsev and Lyudmila Ulitskaya signed a statement that demanded the public, expert community and the media to continue follow closely the case of Yuri Dmitriev, not to allow the "siloviki" (people of the state apparatus) of Karelia to treat an honest citizen this way and not allowing to silence and pervert the tragic pages of Russian history.²⁹ Zoya Svetovaya sums up the sentiment shared by many regarding the whole affair: "*The thing is, that during 20 years of Putin's inquisitional justice system people have learned to differentiate between ordered and unfair processes from those cases in which there is at least some hint of a real criminal act*".³⁰

²⁷ Meduza.io: Главу карельского «Мемориала» начали судить по делу об изготовлении детской порнографии. Главные Адвокаты и соратники считают процесс сфабрикованным <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/06/01/glavu-karelskogo-memoriala-nachali-sudit-po-delu-ob-izgotovlenii-detskoy-pornografii-glavnoe> 1.6.2017

²⁸ Meduza.io: «Это и есть гражданская война». Светлана Алексиевич, Борис Гребенщиков, Дмитрий Быков и другие — о деле Юрия Дмитриева. <https://meduza.io/feature/2017/09/16/eto-i-est-grazhdanskaya-voyna-svetlana-aleksievich-boris-grebenshikov-dmitriy-bykov-i-drugie-o-dele-yuriya-dmitrieva-video> 16.9.2017

²⁹ Novaya Gazeta: «Для достижения несправедных целей ломается судьба ребенка...» Заявление по делу Юрия Дмитриева <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/10/28/82526-dlya-dostizheniya-nepovednyh-tseley-romaetsya-sudba-rebenka> 27.10.2019

³⁰ 7x7: «За 20 лет путинского инквизиционного правосудия люди научились отличать заказные процессы». Что пишут о приговоре карельскому историк Юрию Дмитриеву. <https://7x7-journal.ru/articles/2020/07/22/za-20-let-putinskogo-inkvizicionnogo-pravosudiya-lyudi-nauchilis-otlichat-zakaznye-processy-chto-pishut-o-prigovore-karelskomu-istoriku-yuriyu-dmitrievu> 22.7.2020

Memorial has constantly stated ever since the whole affair began that these charges have no actual basis and Dmitriev is innocent. On their web site many factors have been listed regarding the criminal case and what kind of numerous inconsistencies can be found in it. The whole court process has not been conducted in a fair and balanced manner, there has rather been issues with impartiality, and the court proceedings have been closed making it difficult to follow how the case progresses. Memorial has noted that the charges against Dmitriev can be seen as persecution that fits with manifestly obvious societal tendencies. The attitude of the authorities towards the legacy of Stalinism has changed, and this can be seen for example in the treatment of Memorial, an organization devoted to preserving the historical memory of Stalinist repressions. Declaring Memorial as a foreign agent, imposing on it fines worth of millions of rubles and subjecting its activists to criminal proceedings are concrete manifestations of this.³¹

The Russian state is taking control over sites that have some connection to the memory of the repressions, and especially places that relate to international memories receive particularly harsh treatment. Sandarmokh is such a place, as the victims there are of many different nationalities. Yuri Dmitriev supported the national memory of those who died, and every year on August 5th a memorial gathering was held in Sandarmokh that was dedicated to the victims of the Great Terror. People from various countries attended this gathering, including large delegations from Poland and Ukraine. After the war in Eastern Ukraine began in 2014, the authorities were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with foreigners visiting Sandarmokh, the memorial gatherings and the free discussions of the Russian political situation. Also, the Russian media started disseminating the story about Soviet soldiers being executed by the Finns coincidingly with the time of Dmitriev's arrest. Therefore, Memorial sees that this all is part of the authorities' strategy to suppress both the action of civil society and the memory of inconvenient events from the past.³²

Dmitriev was not the only historian working on Sandarmokh, who was arrested. Sergey Koltyrin, the director of the Medvezhegorsk City Museum was arrested in October of 2018 over charges of pedophilia. The following year he was sentenced to 9 years of imprisonment. He was one of the people who took part in the excavations of Sandarmokh with its finder Yuri Dmitriev.³³ Before his arrest Koltyrin was in charge of maintaining the memorial site. In an

³¹ International Memorial: On the Yury Dmitriev Affair <https://www.memo.ru/en-us/memorial/departments/intermemorial/news/342>

³² Ibid.

³³ Radio Svoboda: Суд приговорил историка Сергея Колтырина к девяти годам колонии 27.5.2019 <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29965867.html>

interview to 7x7 after Dmitriev's arrest, Koltyrin said that he does not support the claims of Finns having executed Soviet soldiers in Sandarmokh. Koltyrin said that Finns did not execute prisoners by shooting them in the back of the head with a revolver (like the skulls found in Sandarmokh indicated), but rather with indiscriminate shots from a machine gun. He also concurs with what Dmitriev said earlier about the location of Sandarmokh being very well hidden by the NKVD, which makes it unlikely that Finns had any idea of its existence. The front line of the war was located not too far from it, so it would have made little sense for Finns to transport prisoners there to be executed. Koltyrin told in the interview as well that he has not received any credible new data from those historians, who claim that Finns have executed prisoners on the site.³⁴

Koltyrin later also criticized the excavations that RVIO started in Sandarmokh. He met with reporters of a Finnish newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat* in Medvezhegorsk just before his arrest and told them that he was suspicious of the motives of RVIO when it comes to their excavations and wondered, why they had been initiated in the first place. He asked the reporters to quote him a modest manner or not at all, as he had already spoken on the matter in Russian media and was told by somebody "from a higher instance" to stay quiet. *Ilta-Sanomat* did not quote him at the time due to this.³⁵ His other colleagues also told in an interview to 7x7 that Koltyrin was afraid of being detained and had received warnings. Elena Tipikina, a journalist from St. Petersburg and one of his colleagues said that Koltyrin was told to "keep quiet, quieter than a mouse" and not make himself heard. He was worried about these warnings according to Tipikina. Another colleague, historian Anatoly Razumov also concurred how Koltyrin was worried about what was happening in Sandarmokh and how that might affect him. In light of all this Razumov was not surprised to hear about Koltyrin's arrest. As the case was with Dmitriev, people who knew Koltyrin did not believe the criminal charges and gave him their support. In the same interview conducted by 7x7 his colleagues and other people who knew him did not believe that he could have done what he was accused of.³⁶ Sergey Koltyrin died on April 2nd, 2020 while in custody. Like many supporters of Dmitriev saw the accusations against him as a form of reprisal,

³⁴ 7x7, Anna Yarovaya: Переписать Сандармох <https://lr.7x7-journal.ru/sandarmokh/>

³⁵ Ilta-Sanomat: Jo toinen Karjalan joukkohautojen tutkija pidätettiin pedofiliasta – Sergei Koltyrin ei uskonut Venäjän version Suomen teloituksista Sandarmohissa <https://www.is.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000005849921.html> 2.10.2018

³⁶ 7x7: «7x7» рассказывает историю главного смотрителя Сандармоха Сергея Колтырина. Его подозревают в сексуальном преступлении <https://7x7-journal.ru/articles/2018/10/04/7h7-rasskazyvaet-istoriyu-glavnogo-smotritelya-sandarmoha-sergeya-koltyrina-ego-podozrevayut-v-seksualnom-prestuplenii> 4.10.2018

Koltyrin's colleagues suspect that his prison sentence might have been a result of his outspokenness against the excavations of RVIO.³⁷

The complex and sometimes confusing chain of events regarding Sandarmokh was finalized with excavations conducted by RVIO. The result of the excavations is discussed in the next chapter in more detail, but it is important to understand what kind of an organization RVIO is. It was originally known as the Imperial Russian Military Historical Society, which was created by the Decree of Emperor Nicholas II and it operated during the years 1907-1917. It was recreated as Russian Military Historical Society in 2012 by an Edict of President Vladimir Putin. Its objectives are to *“consolidate the forces of the state and society in the study of Russia's military historical past, to promote the study of Russian military history and counteract attempts to distort it, to popularize the achievements of military-historical science, raise the prestige of military service, and patriotism education.”* This includes for example building monuments in different regions of Russia, painting “patriotic graffiti” on the facades of houses, taking care of monuments and burial sites, conducting search work for remains of soldiers of Russian and Red Army and preserving cultural heritage. They also organize patriotic camps and trainings for children and teenagers and also over half a million children have been transported on military-historical routes. RVIO also has scientific and educational work, for example they have published books about *“outstanding personalities and key events in the history of the Fatherland.”*³⁸

Before the excavations started, a set of roundtable discussions took place in the Petrozavodsk State University on June 6th, 2017. The discussions were conducted under the title of *“New documents about Soviet prisoners of war on the territory of Medvezhegorsk region during the period of Finnish occupation (1941-1944)”*. Participating public figures, state officials, researchers and journalists discussed whether the new data on executed Soviet prisoners was trustworthy. The whole event turned into a debate between historians who wanted to investigate the possibility of finding prisoners executed by the Finns and those who did not agree with this. The organizers of the roundtable were historians Yuri Kilin and Sergey Verigin - the same people who have discussed the topic on Finnish and Russian media. In addition to discussing their hypothesis about Sandarmokh being a burial site for Soviet prisoners of war, they

³⁷ Meduza.io: Умер карельский историк Сергей Колтырин, осужденный на девять лет по делу о педофилии <https://meduza.io/news/2020/04/02/umer-karelskiy-istorik-sergey-koltyrin-osuzhdenny-na-devyat-let-po-delu-o-pedofilii> 2.4.2020

³⁸ RVIO: Reference about the activities of the Russian Military Historical Society <https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news-en/item-4711>

expressed the need to search for these bodies on the site. Kilin and Verigin were not supported completely by other fellow historians, for example Aleksandr Osiev argued during the discussions that the location of Sandarmokh would not have been logistically easily accessible for Finns during the war, as it was located just by the frontline. Also, Finns had their prison camps near Medvezhegorsk, and executed Soviet prisoners would have been buried in the nearby area instead of transporting them 19 kilometers to Sandarmokh. Also, the number of executed people was debated. Osiev estimated the number of executed prisoners to be in hundreds, whereas Verigin and Kilin spoke about thousands. Some historians, like the director of the Karelian National Museum Mikhail Goldenberg, did not participate in the roundtable discussions. He described the discussions as “football in one goal” (a Russian saying for one sided actions), since the main opponent Yuri Dmitriev was not participating in them due to his imprisonment.³⁹

It appears to be based on the whole chain of events surrounding Sandarmokh, that in this case there are two group of historians, who are in a very different position. Historians like Kilin and Verigin could be seen to have acquired double authority in a sense that they are professional historians with links to RVIO, in other words to the Russian state. They can be authorities just based on their education, but so are Dmitriev and Koltyrin was before his death. What separates these historians is that whereas Kilin and Verigin have a strong position to make statements and get media coverage due to their connections to the state apparatus, Dmitriev and Koltyrin are facing a double exclusion. They are excluded because of their imprisonment and pedophilia charges. Their opinions are of no significance, even if they are professional historians, because they are seen as “imprisoned perverts”. This reminds once again of Foucault’s reason/madness division, as Dmitriev and Koltyrin are excluded not just from the discussion concerning Sandarmokh, but from the society in general. What could be a more dire form on exclusion than imprisonment? Many have deemed their sentences to be political, and indeed it would serve a special purpose to convict them both of such horrific crimes, because who would take anything seriously uttered by such madmen? The next chapter moves on to discuss the different memory politics that manifest themselves in Sandarmokh, and this division of “reasonable historians” and “mad historians” can be seen there as well.

³⁹ 7x7: Версии о расстрелах военнопленных в Сандармохе в Карелии. За и против. <https://7x7-journal.ru/articles/2017/06/07/versii-o-rasstreлах-voennoplennyh-v-sandarmohe-v-karelii-za-i-protiv> 7.6.2017

6. MEMORY POLITICS OF SANDARMOKH

“If you don't like what is being said, then change the conversation.” – Donald Draper, Mad Men

This chapter ties together the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3, the domestic context laid out in Chapter 4 and the events presented in Chapter 5. The main idea is to understand, why these kinds of memory politics are conducted in Russia, how it affects the discourse and its rules, what kind of distortion is involved in the discussion and why the societal atmosphere in Russia facilitates this. At this point all the pieces of the puzzle have been presented, and now the whole picture can be put together.

6.1. Constructing memories – Nothing is forgotten and a historical amnesia

To demonstrate how a certain reading of history is preferred, even with futile evidence, can be seen when looking into the excavations conducted by RVIO. The first round of excavations started in 2018 in Sandarmokh on 25th of August, and they lasted until 5th of September. The aim of the excavations was to locate soldiers, who were executed during the Second World War.⁴⁰ In a press conference organized by RVIO only a few days after the excavations had ended, its scientific director Mikhail Myagkov said that *“Karelian historians have a hypothesis, that in the tract of Sandarmokh there could have been buried our prisoners of war, who were in Finnish concentration camps during the years of Great Patriotic War.”* Myagkov also spoke about the preliminary findings of the excavations, where the remains of five people were found alongside remains of greatcoats, tunics, felt boots, bullets and casings from weapons of various calibers manufactured in different countries. According to him, the nature of the bullet holes shows that these people were shot, and the bullets came from weapons not accessible to NKVD, which implies that the shooters could have been Finnish. Sergey Verigin also spoke in the same press-conference and said that while Finnish specialists exchanged information with their Russian colleagues on killed Soviet prisoners of war, the locations of their burial sites were not given, which means that until today those sites in Karelia are not known. It was concluded that the study of the territory of Sandarmokh must be surely continued.⁴¹

The press-conference was criticized in Novaya Gazeta for the fact that the people who were representing RVIO did not personally participate in the excavations and had not invited Finnish

⁴⁰ TASS: РВИО проведет в Карелии экспедицию в районе захоронения жертв политических репрессий <https://nauka.tass.ru/nauka/5489056> 24.8.2018

⁴¹ RIA Novosti: В Сандармох могли захоронить советских военнопленных, считают историки. <https://ria.ru/20180907/1528041146.html> 07.09.2018

experts to the conference (who were accused there of rewriting history). The whole conference did not address that much the actual findings of the excavations, and most of the focus was on other things than on Sandarmokh itself. This implies that the findings were not very significant

⁴² The excavations were not met happily with the relatives of those, who are buried in Sandarmokh. The relatives published an open letter in August of 2018 addressed to the Ministry of Culture of Russian Federation, the Karelian local and municipal government instances and to RVIO demanding the excavations to be cancelled. They emphasized the importance of Sandarmokh as a unique memorial site for the terror of the 20th century and the national tragedy which happens to also be a personal and family tragedy for the relatives. They also pointed out how the claim about Finns executing Soviet prisoners in Sandarmokh have no factual basis and the excavations would just violate the integrity of the memorial cemetery and disturb the peace of the dead. They conclude the letter by stating: *“May this land remain untouched further. We are against carrying out new excavations here, for which there is no documented and scientifically proven basis.”*⁴³

Another set of excavations were nevertheless carried out a year later in August of 2019. A press service organized by RVIO was held in Moscow, where it was told that 16 remains were dug out and bullets assumedly of foreign origin were found, which were all sent for further analysis. In the press service it was repeated like a year earlier, that the excavations are done to see if the scientific hypothesis of executed Soviet prisoners is true. The results of the earlier excavations were summarized as well, and it was told how the bullets that were found at the time are based on ballistic analysis from weapons “Mauser K 96” and “Brauning M1903” that were used by the Finnish army. Sergei Verigin was quoted as well saying that these and the findings concluded a year earlier support the hypothesis of executions carried out by the Finns.

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The findings of these two excavations are yet to prove anything conclusively, but RVIO and many historians seem certain that their hypothesis can be proven. Regardless of the fairly unimpressive findings, RVIO has greatly helped in the construction of a memory that puts Sandarmokh into the realm of World War II. It is thus a memory, that is easier to digest than that of domestic violence. Even if no additional excavations are carried out, the site is not

⁴² Novaya Gazeta: «Есть гипотеза карельских историков...»

<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/09/08/77765-est-gipoteza-karelskih-istorikov> 8.9.2018

⁴³ Novaya Gazeta: «Не тревожьте могилы». Открытое письмо

<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/08/24/77592-ne-trevozhte-mogily-otkrytoe-pismo> 24.8.2018

⁴⁴ TASS: Останки 16 человек обнаружены экспедицией РВИО в урочище Сандармох в Карелии
<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6779746> 20.8.2019

dedicated anymore solely to the memory of those who perished in the repressions. In peoples' minds there are now two memories, and the one that is based on weaker evidence is likely to be promoted more. This is all parallel to the general situation in Russia, where the memory of these two historical events has been constructed to have very different levels of significance. Whereas in the case of Sandarmokh there is a clear proof that it is a mass grave for victims of political repressions, this does not seem to matter as much as the futile evidence of executed Soviet prisoners of war, which is at its current state just a hypothesis. The division between a historical amnesia and nothing is forgotten is an embodiment of the way memory has been constructed in this case. Through official state commemoration, education and popular culture World War II is constantly kept in peoples' minds, whereas Stalinist repressions are acknowledged but largely ignored and even belittled by some. This situation is not there by a chance, and it is socially constructed as the whole situation is a result of conscious effort to create and maintain such a situation. The importance of war memory is essential for those in power, whereas the memory of repressions offers very little to work with. At its worst, it can create unwanted discussion concerning those in power, so it is better left in its current state of oblivion. Whereas countries like Germany have critically assessed the wrongs of their history, in Russia this work is still to be done. Things could have been constructed differently, there is no force that has driven things to their place without any involvement of those in power.

The excavations and the events leading up to them demonstrate well how important it is for the Russian state to have a glorious past. In sites that commemorate something traumatic, it is preferable to muddy this memory with a more prestige one. This is done by giving voice to historians who are "on the right side", excluding those who are not, and allowing excavations to be carried out with very little evidence and against the will of those whose relatives are buried there. If one is to draw from Johan Galtung's idea of the three forces of CMT (chosenness-myth-trauma) complex (presented in Chapter 3) that helps to understand national identity, World War II is a good example. It is presented as a fight of the Soviet people against a great enemy, so they were the chosen nation to free the world from an evil fascist force. The myth is that a nation came together as one and fought with the leadership of Stalin and saved the world. The trauma is of course the sacrifices that were suffered during the war, but this was the cost of the chosen nation to beat Nazism. Stalinist repressions do not have this kind of capability to mold national identity, as it is just a trauma and without any glorious outcome. This is why Sandarmokh has gone through this process.

6.2. Discourse – What is relevant history?

It is quite clear, when looking into the Russian discourse on Stalinist repressions and World War II that it is regulated what can and cannot be said. According to the Foucauldian discourse analysis presented in Chapter 3 there are three dimensions of discourse, these being exclusion, rarefaction and restriction. These together define, who is the “master” of the speech. The discourse concerning Sandarmokh has usually revolved around Stalinist repressions, and the context of war has been left out as the executions took place some years before the war. However, this has changed during the past few years as Sandarmokh has entered the realm of war memories. It seems that historians like Dmitriev and Koltyrin were excluded from this discourse on the outset, because their views were so strongly against the hypothesis of Finns executing Soviet prisoners in Sandarmokh. This is the external procedure of the discourse, that defines who can access it. Foucault wrote about the traditional exclusion concerning reasonable and mad speech, but in this case the excluded speech is not crazy. It is factual statements emanating from historians who worked closely with Sandarmokh for decades and have researched it extensively. What their statements do not comply with can be found from the internal procedures of discourse, where one must locate a major text that has a primary position and remains said again and again. Commentaries must in the end make reference to the major text.

In order to apply Foucault’s approach into this, one must first and foremost define a text that would have a major position and to which other texts must refer. It should be something written by a powerful figure and would discuss interpretation of history. It does not necessarily need to explicitly discuss Sandarmokh, but it should make reference to the same historical era that is at the center of this debate. What could be considered as such is a text written by President Vladimir Putin, that was published in an American journal called *“The National Interest”* in June of 2020 titled *“Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II”*. In it he stresses the importance of Great Patriotic War to the Russian nation, and how future generations must understand the hardships that their ancestors had to endure. He goes on to say that the heroism embodied in this generation lives on in the Russian nation: *“This is why I am confident that one of the characteristic features of the peoples of Russia is to fulfill their duty without feeling sorry for themselves when the circumstances so demand. Such values as selflessness, patriotism, love for their home, their family and Motherland remain fundamental and integral to the Russian society to this day. These values are, to a large extent, the backbone of our country's sovereignty.”*

In the text Putin discusses the history of the 1930's and how countries like Poland participated in the Nazi plans to divide Czechoslovakia in the so-called "Munich Betrayal". Putin sees that the Soviet Union was the only country to stand up for Czechoslovakia and that it was clear that the Munich Betrayal demonstrated, how the Western countries were willing to set aside Soviet Union's interests and were even capable of creating an anti-Soviet front if needed. He proceeds to defend the Non-Aggression Pact signed by Stalin and Hitler, as it was done out of necessity to buy more time in a situation where the Soviet Union was left alone to deal with Germany and its allies. What follows this is quite interesting, when Putin writes that *"Stalin and his entourage, indeed, deserve many legitimate accusations. We remember the crimes committed by the regime against its own people and the horror of mass repressions. In other words, there are many things the Soviet leaders can be reproached for, but poor understanding of the nature of external threats is not one of them."* He argues that there was no friendship between the USSR and Germany, and that a covert war against Nazism was taking place already.

From analyzing history Putin at some point switches to the current moment, and he criticizes "our partners" for carrying out information attacks towards Russia: *"Thus, for example, the resolution on the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe approved by the European Parliament on 19 September 2019 directly accused the USSR together with the Nazi Germany of unleashing the Second World War."* He continues that *"Indeed, it was adopted by a highly respectable institution. And what does that show? Regrettably, this reveals a deliberate policy aimed at destroying the post-war world order whose creation was a matter of honour and responsibility for States a number of representatives of which voted today in favour of this deceitful resolution."* He writes that desecrating and insulting the memory is mean, and it can be cowardly *"as in the situation when monuments erected in honour of those who fought against Nazism are demolished and these shameful acts are justified by the false slogans of the fight against an unwelcome ideology and alleged occupation."* Putin also warns that *"Historical revisionism, the manifestations of which we now observe in the West, and primarily with regard to the subject of the Second World War and its outcome, is dangerous because it grossly and cynically distorts the understanding of the principles of peaceful development, laid down at the Yalta and San Francisco conferences in 1945."*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The National Interest: Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982?page=0%2C5> 18.6.2020

One could write extensive comments on Putin's interpretation on historical events of the 20th century, but for the sake of memory politics it is sensible to focus on how he lays out similar themes that have arisen in the discourse surrounding Sandarmokh. One of these themes are the heroism, that people demonstrated during the war, and how this even today obliges Russian people to "fulfill their duty" if circumstances so demand. Another theme is the downplaying of Stalinist repressions while at the same time recognizing them. In his text it is mentioned that Stalin's regime indeed committed crimes against its own people, but he was a great military thinker nevertheless and foresaw the German plans to invade the Soviet Union. It seems as if this weighs more in the end. Also, a theme that has been very common surrounding Sandarmokh is the general distrust against Western countries, and this can also be seen in Putin's text. He points out how today, as in the past, in the end Russia is alone against the hostile West. Whereas during World War II the Soviet Union was left alone to deal with Germany, today the West wants to equate Stalin with Hitler's responsibility in unleashing the war, and monuments commemorating those who fought against Nazism are torn down. A historical revisionism is taking place in the West, and this is directed at Russia and its role in World War II. Domestic texts that suggest anything about the crimes committed by the Soviet Union could be dismissed as such historical revanchism.

In order to assess the Sandarmokh discourse from the point of view of rarefaction, the internal procedures, Putin's text could be seen to be in a major position, to which historians should not sway too far from in order to be remain credible. Other texts are commentaries on them, much like those of Kilin and Verigin, because otherwise they could not access the discourse. In their texts the Stalinist repressions are, if not downplayed, nevertheless far less important than the war, and the West is not to be trusted. It is emphasized how Finns were the ones committing crimes, and how the West and its Russian allies (like Memorial) want to rewrite history that would desecrate the sacrifice and heroism of the Soviet nation. Historians can make their own interpretations, but the major text, as Foucault would see Putin's text, obliges them to refer to its core idea in the form of commentary. Historians like Dmitriev or Koltyrin, or organizations such as Memorial cannot make commentaries in such a discourse, as it would not reiterate the core idea of the major text. Therefore, they must be excluded from the discourse altogether.

In addition to commentaries, another principle of rarefaction is author, the one who wrote the text. The author is always responsible for the written text, and it must either be the major text of the discourse or a commentary to it. In the case of the Sandarmokh discourse there are allowed authors, who can freely access and participate in the discourse, because the text that

they are responsible of does not create any contrary discourses. However, the discourse that such authors like Dmitriev and Koltyrin initiated was silenced. As these two historians were the authors of this discourse, they were punished in the form of prison sentences. So, this discourse was deemed criminal and their authors “perverts”. Only one permitted discourse can exist, and it regulates itself. Authors, who make statements contrary to the dominating Sandarmokh discourse are of course not all imprisoned for starting an opposing discourse, but they can be labelled as foreign agents or other pro-Western actors. As was explained in Chapter 4, in today’s Russia even writings on social media can be considered as a criminal act, since disseminating “false information about World War II” is a criminal act and there is an example of a private person who faced criminal charges after posting on Russian social media platform *Vkontakte*. When people write about history, the text that they author can cause them trouble. Same applies to Sandarmokh, as people have the choice to be authors of texts that can enter the allowed discourse (like Kilin or Verigin), or then be excluded from it and face possible consequences.

A few examples picked up from the Russian state media demonstrate, how the allowed Sandarmokh discourse manifests itself. They support the view that the Stalinist crimes and their scope is exaggerated and that it is more fruitful to discuss how foreigners might have been the real culprits in Sandarmokh. Also, Memorial is discredited and treated as some kind of pseudo-historical organization, that has no place with its claims in the discussion and is thus excluded on the outset. The media paints a picture of right-minded historians, such as Kilin and Verigin, who want to focus on the suffering of the Russian population in the hands of a Finnish occupier, which does not suit the foreign-supported Memorial, that ignores everything that is not related to Stalin’s crimes. This was apparent in two news stories published in Russian news outlets *Izvestiya* and *Zvezda*, that could also be seen as commentary to the major text presented above, as they discuss Kilin and Verigin in a positive light and how their findings cast a huge shadow over Memorial’s findings. These stories repeat the same rhetoric: history is fabricated by the West, and in Russia it is the work of real historians to fight against these desecrating claims and such domestic organizations like Memorial.

The fact that Kilin’s text was published in *Kaleva*, a relatively big Finnish newspaper caught the attention of Russian media. *Izvestiya* published a story titled “Memorial’s data on repressions in Karelia may have to be revised” (*Данные "Мемориала" о репрессиях в Карелии могут быть пересмотрены*). The story summarizes Kilin’s article and claims that his findings cast a shadow over Memorial’s opinion on Sandarmokh being a burial site exclusively for victims of Stalin’s repressions. In the story it is as well mentioned, how Memorial has been

recognized as a foreign agent. *Izvestiya* also interviewed Sergey Verigin, who confirms Kilin's findings and also doubts the accuracy of the data gathered by Memorial. According to Verigin, it is possible that Memorial's claims regarding 9 thousand executed prisoners are exaggerated, and that they have been focusing solely on the victims of Stalin's repressions, whereas completely ignoring the possibility that Soviet prisoners could have been shot and buried on the spot as well. "*Memorial is not interested, that in these same execution pits there may Soviet soldiers*", Verigin says. In the end of the story Yuri Dmitriev from Memorial is mentioned and it is explained how he is "*categorically against Klinin's claims*". According to Dmitriev, it is impossible that the Finns knew about these execution pits as they were top secret NKVD information concealed from everybody.⁴⁶

A few weeks later *Zvezda* published a story concerning Sandarmokh. It was titled in a more conspicuous manner "Second truth about concentration camp Sandarmokh: how Finns slaughtered thousands of our soldiers" (*Вторая правда концлагеря Сандармох: как финны замучили тысячи наших солдат*). The story starts by noting that annually on 5-7th of August on the Memorial Day of the Great Terror the dead are reminisced in Sandarmokh. "*But – not all*", the story adds and continues that they have received archival material from the FSB, that includes evidence of massive graves of Soviet prisoners, who were imprisoned and killed in Finnish concentration camps during the Great Patriotic War. The findings in these archival materials resemble greatly what Yuri Kilin wrote in Kaleva earlier, and his interview in is referred in the story. Interestingly, it is also used as a way to prove how the state security apparatus (the used term is "*рука госбезопасности*", the hand of the state security) was not involved in the publication process of Kilin's article in the Finnish newspaper, as it was done "before the de-classification of the archives on Sandarmokh". It is also added that the data of these sensational studies does not fit into the "historical research" (quotations marks are used in the story) conducted by Memorial.⁴⁷ It has been noted that this whole sequence about the hand of state security is a bit odd, as the information given to *Zvezda* by the FSB was supposed to confirm Kilin's independent findings, that just happened to be consistent with the archival data that was released later. However, Sergey Verigin later explained to journalists that both Kilin and Verigin worked on the FSB archives at the same time independently from each other.

⁴⁶ *Izvestiya.ru*: Данные "Мемориала" о репрессиях в Карелии могут быть пересмотрены. 15.07.2016

⁴⁷ *Zvezda.ru*: Вторая правда концлагеря Сандармох: как финны замучили тысячи наших солдат. <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/qhistory/content/201608040821-ge82.htm> 04.08.2016

This is quite contrary to *Zvezda*'s statement about Kilin "foreseeing" these results before any archival data were released.⁴⁸

6.3. Post-truth discourse - Does it even matter, who is buried?

In the case of Sandarmokh, it seems to be that historical facts have lost their meaning to an extent, just as they have when it comes to Stalinist repressions. Even though repressions are acknowledged to have taken place by and large, it seems that many people either brush them off as something that was necessary to conduct in order to build a strong nation or deny their existence, whereas some consider them to be exaggerated and used as a weapon to discredit the glorious Soviet history. Whatever the reasons may be, Stalinist repressions are contested even if they are a fact of history and have been widely documented in historical research. It almost seems like facts do not count, but rather what fits the general discourse about Stalin. As he is getting more and more popular among Russians, the arguments that admire his role as a leader in the war are getting more common just like the claims that repressions and their scale is exaggerated. It is a peculiar situation, where the repressions are acknowledged, but at the same time forgotten. Facts are there, but they do not matter. Historians, who bring up inconvenient facts face the risk of being imprisoned, whereas other historians can get support, even with almost non-existent findings. This could be seen to be a part of a bigger phenomenon known as post-truth, where verified facts and opinions are equated.

The whole debate surrounding Sandarmokh could be seen having entered the sphere of post-truth discourse, where facts and opinions are equal, and facts are even less appreciated than far-fetched theories. RVIO has found quite unspectacular proof to support its theory about executed Soviet prisoners, but it is received by many as if the findings were significant. It does not seem to matter who is buried in Sandarmokh in the end, just the thought of the victims being somebody else than political prisoners apparently suffices to set facts aside. As conventional criteria for evidence seems less and less important and the significance of facts is eroding, RVIO can publish its findings and gain public support. If people are ready to forget facts, then it is an open market for unsubstantiated opinions. At the same time, if one is to draw from Foucault's analysis, historians Dmitriev and Koltyrin could be seen as practitioners of *parrhesia*, as their inner conviction demands them to keep the memory of Stalinist repressions alive. In this case the risk that can come along with *parrhesia* was real, and they both paid the price as they faced imprisonment and Koltyrin passed away in prison, whereas Dmitriev is unlikely to walk as a

⁴⁸ 7x7, Анна Уарова: Переписать Сандармох <https://lr.7x7-journal.ru/sandarmokh/>

free man for the next ten years or so. Could the claims made by RVIO on the other hand be seen as *isegoria*? This would not be the case in modern-day Russia, where free speech in the sphere of history is not exercised. If there was freedom of expression, these views expressed by pro-state historians would be indeed *isegoria*, but in this situation where historical authorship is formulated in an authoritarian manner, there is no division on those who speak the truth or just express their freedom of speech. All historians must comply with this imposed interpretation, or they are not considered as real historians. Facts do not matter anymore, but compliance.

6.4. Distortion and confusion in Karelia

The complete or partial distortion of facts, that concerns the Stalinist repressions is not a new phenomenon and is probably most notorious in the case of Holocaust denial. Not all Holocaust deniers completely deny that it did not happen, as they can admit that indeed it was the Nazi intent to annihilate the Jews, but they claim that it failed as only a part of the Jewish population was murdered, even perhaps a much smaller number than what is usually claimed. This leads to another common claim that the number of Holocaust victims is exaggerated and is not as big as thought. Therefore, in addition to blatant denial of established historical facts there is more tacit phenomenon known as Holocaust distortion, which has its background in the rise of authoritarianism, populism, dictatorial regimes, nationalism and anti-liberalism. What applies to Holocaust distortion applies to the broader phenomenon of historical distortion, where there simultaneously exists partial truth, but also a great deal of untruth. Historical misinterpretation and distortion thrive in political systems where authoritarian and illiberal practices are taking place, as they strengthen nationalistic authoritarianism by presenting a unified positive image of the nation's past to counter its detractors, be it real or imagined. (Bauer, 2020, 209–219)

To draw from this analogue, it seems that a similar trend of distortion is taking place in Russia concerning Stalinist repressions. They are not completely denied, as most acknowledge that they took place. President Putin has called them “*a tragedy for our people, for the whole of society, a cruel blow to our people, our roots, culture and self-awareness*”⁴⁹, so there is no denial from the part of the Russian state that they indeed happened. What is notable here, is that Putin does not explicitly mention who was guilty of the repressions but speaks of them like a natural disaster that just happened. This agentless interpretation is in stark contrast against the

⁴⁹ AP: Russia's Putin condemns Soviet-era political repressions
<https://apnews.com/article/e708f321bd83433395d77755fa6651db> 30.10.2017

agent interpretation of World War II, where the role of the Soviet Union is emphasized. However, even if Putin admits that the repressions took place, what can be seen in the Russian media seems more like a blatant distortion where the scale of the repressions for example is challenged. Also, combining the memory of World War II with Stalinist repressions is a way to distort the memory, or to at least move attention somewhere else. In historical distortion facts are not completely set aside, but it involves a good amount of untrue statements as well. A few examples can be taken from the Russian media, where the findings of Memorial are belittled, and the focus is on Finnish atrocities and other things than Stalinist repressions, which on the other hand are downplayed.

The first example of this is from *Rossiya 24*, which published a 14-minute reportage a few weeks after Dmitriev's arrest. The reportage was part of a program called "WWW" and it was titled "What the Memorial society hides" (*что скрывает общество "Мемориал"*). In the beginning of the reportage accusations against Dmitriev were discussed with dramatic music in the background while displaying censored versions of the photos that supposedly are the basis for the criminal investigation. Then the host of the show went on to say in a discrediting way how the affair "*was seen by some as a provocation*" and that it is "*difficult to understand these people, who support Dmitriev after such accusations*". From the onset it was made clear to the viewer that the accusations are not political, and people who think so do not understand the severity of the crime. It was also mentioned that a petition defending Dmitriev was published in a "notorious" web site *change.org*. After that the reportage went on to cast a shadow of doubt over Memorial, as it was described as one of those organizations that "*just have to be against official stances or confirmed historical facts*". The host also said how Memorial is making anti-Soviet statements and is a political, not just a humanitarian organization, as it claims. Finally, he brought up Memorial's status as a "foreign agent" and how they receive funding from suspicious sources, like from George Soros' fund and other American sources. This is done to discredit their trustworthiness and to imply that Memorial's interests are those of their foreign supporters. In the end Sandarmokh was mentioned, and it was questioned whether the number of found bodies is true or rather exaggerated. All in all, the reportage managed in a little more than ten minutes' time to not only cast a shadow of doubt over Dmitriev, but also to discredit Memorial as a whole and even their work on Sandarmokh. ⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Россия 24: WWW: что скрывает общество "Мемориал". 10.1.2017
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=458tWi0GRZE>

The second example of this is a story published in 2018 in the aftermath of RVIO's first round of excavations in a news portal called *КМ-новости*. It was titled "Bullet in the heads, hands tied behind back: killed soldiers created hysteria amongst liberals and the West" (*Пули в головах, руки связаны за спиной: убитые солдаты вызвали истерику у либералов и на Западе*). The story starts by noting how the findings confirm that Finns indeed shot Soviet soldiers in Sandarmokh. It was also noted, how this information raised "a loud squeal" by the liberal media and the "false-protection organization" Memorial, as these findings break the so-called evidence about bloody Stalin and mass executions of the NKVD. The story also mentions how Finnish "scientists" (quotation marks are used) are keeping up with Memorial and its false evidence. Supposedly, Memorial tried to organize a campaign against the excavations in order to prevent finding "*uncomfortable historical and archeological evidence for the liberals*", and it was also mentioned how Memorial is a pseudo-human rights organization with its lies and fraudulent practices. In the end, the story concludes how the "lies of Solzhenitsyn" and others like him are becoming a thing of the past, and thus it is not surprising why liberals are going into collective hysteria. It is concluded that "*no grants, no Western patron will help the false defenders.*"⁵¹

The third news story from Russian media that perpetuates these standpoints was published in a site called *IA Regnum* in 2019 titled "The historical memory against German revanchism and liberal betrayal" (*Память истории против немецкого реваншизма и либерального предательства*). In the story, it is criticized how Nazism is equated with Communism, and in the end Sandarmokh is brought up. According to the story, the bodies in Sandarmokh are not victims of political repressions but Red Army soldiers killed by "White Finns", and liberal media with the support of "notorious" Memorial Society and political party Yabloko have raised a campaign against RVIO. The story claims that RVIO's hypothesis about "Finnish invaders" having killed the people in Sandarmokh is closer to the truth. It is also claimed that some of the pits, where victims of so-called repressions should have been buried were in fact empty. A question is presented to the reader: "*To what extent is such falsification possible in other places as well?*", and after that it is suggested that mass graves in Katyn or Smolensk region might not be results of Soviet but German purges. The story is concluded by asking, how

⁵¹ КМ-новости: Пули в головах, руки связаны за спиной: убитые солдаты вызвали истерику у либералов и на Западе. 12.09.2018

much is needed for these lies of Perestroika era to be refuted before the Western owners of Memorial are discovered and made public.⁵²

These stories portray Memorial as an organization receiving Western support, therefore not being patriotic. They also portray liberals as a group working against Russia, however it is not explained in more detail who these so-called liberals in fact are. Sergey Verigin, one of the strongest proponents of the theory of executions conducted by the Finns, has also brought up the pro-Western liberals and the West, who try to play the “Sandarmokh card” in the sense of information attacks against progressive and patriotic forces in Russia. This is done to rewrite the Russian history in their own way, impose their will on all its inhabitants and to subject it to the dictates of the West.⁵³ As these examples demonstrate, the idea is to distort the facts and move attention away to other things like Russian liberals or German and Finnish invaders. The last story even suggests, that if Sandarmokh is based on such a lie, why could not other similar mass graves in Katyn or Smolensk be based on false historical interpretation as well.

This kind of distortion could be easily scuffed off by an educated reader who is aware of history, but for many it can leave a seed of doubt in their mind. If enough people doubt the course of history, and this combined with an atmosphere where post-truth claims are no stranger, this doubt can become widely accepted. This is well summed up in an interview on *New York Times* with Anatoly Razumov. He is the director of the Center for Recovered Names and has co-authored with Yuri Dmitriev a book listing the names of more than 6 thousand people killed by the NKVD in or near Sandarmokh. Razumov called this hunt for evidence of Finnish atrocities as a way for the Russian state to create “hybrid history”. By this he means that Russia’s past is muddled by mixing them with nationalist tropes and wild conjecture designed to confuse and distort. He notes, that the same has taken place regarding Katyn massacre, where the role of the NKVD in the execution of more than 20 thousand Polish military officers, cleric and intellectuals is discredited. RVIO has had a role in this, as it has been revising a Soviet claim that Hitler’s army was partly to blame for the Katyn massacre. Just like it is now proposing that Finns are partly to be blamed for Sandarmokh.⁵⁴

⁵² Regnum.ru: Память истории против немецкого реваншизма и либерального предательства. 19.7.2019 <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2650091.html>

⁵³ Novaya Gazeta: Раз уж пришлось меряться книгами... <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/03/15/84327-raz-uzh-prishlos-meryatsya-knigami> 15.3.2020

⁵⁴ The New York Times: He Found One of Stalin’s Mass Graves. Now He’s in Jail. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/27/world/europe/russia-historian-stalin-mass-graves.html> 27.4.2020

What can be seen here is also delimiting the discourse of the Russian opposition. These news stories are examples of “throwing in more discourse”. It can be done through suspicious websites like *KM-novosti* or *IA Regnum* that present wild arguments about Sandarmokh and are portrayed as worthwhile theories, equivalent to those of Memorial and such organizations. The difference of course is that Memorial actually studied Sandarmokh and political repressions and is not just presenting opinions but factual statements, which are now equated with these less educated arguments. This could be seen as *isegoria*, because there are just opinions and their aim is not even necessarily to tell the truth. This is done in order to belittle the public arena and to distort the already confusing situation. It could appear to an outsider that the discourse is indeed fair, since there are so many statements involved, but this is not a balanced state versus opposition debate. It is rather a debate, where one claim by the opposition is facing hundred arguments and theories from less-credible sources. This is the case with Sandarmokh, because the discussion is not a balanced one, but mostly just theories that in the end support the view of the state, and only some dissenting views are present. In many stories there can be seen an argument that “nothing can be excluded”, which is clever in a sense that it shifts the burden of repeal to the reader. It is the reader who can be asked to prove these claims to be false, no matter how outlandish they may be.

Distortion has taken place in other commemorative sites for repressions too. The focus of these sites has been shifted away from repressions, as other topics are introduced alongside them. This can be seen in two former prison camps known as Perm-36 and Mednoe. Perm-36 was a prison camp where many political prisoners were held during the Soviet times in the Perm Region. Activists in Perm established on the site a Memorial Museum for the History of Political Repressions in the 1990’s, and the Memorial Society had its own role in establishing it as a discussion platform concerning the phenomenon of mass repressions. It became a very popular site, and this was not to the liking of the local administration, and when the general course in Russia turned towards patriotism and national values, Perm-36 was caught in the middle of an ideological conflict. The state wanted to turn it into a museum of “Penitentiary services”. So, the problem was not only whether the museum was conserved, but in which context it would be presented. Sergei Shevyrin, an employee of Perm-36 told to *Nastoyashee Vremya* that as a historian he sees that there is a historical memory, which is now being forgotten. In the same interview Yuliya Batalina from the Perm branch of Memorial Society concludes: “*We are talking that repressions exist. We understand that it is bad. But god forbid*

if you make any generalizations.” She also adds that Perm-36 is a case where it is forbidden to “*go outside the flags, where everything is controlled by the state.*”⁵⁵

A similar development has taken place in Tver Region regarding a burial site called Mednoe, where Polish prisoners of war and Soviet victims of repressions were buried. Their executions were carried out by NKVD. The burial site was located by the Tver branch of Memorial, and the memorial site was opened in 2000. In 2015, a roundtable discussion was held in Tver, where experts, also from RVIO, concluded that no Poles are buried in Mednoe, but instead Red Army soldiers executed by German forces and in light of this the memorial site is not historically objective. In April of 2015, a roundtable discussion was held under the theme “*Distortion of the history of World War II – information aggression against modern Russia*”. A resolution was passed to establish a list of names and perpetuating the memory of servicemen of the Red Army and NKVD, and to establish a memorial site for the victims who died during 1941-1944. In an interview to *Novaya Gazeta* Ivan Tsykov, a former employee of the Mednoe memorial complex said that to blame Germans for executions is not possible in this case, as they were in the territory of Mednoe only for three days during a time of heavy fighting. Nevertheless, the concept of the memorial site is being changed as a new exposition is being developed by the Museum of Contemporary History, to which Mednoe has been subordinate since 2012, in cooperation with RVIO. Another former employee of the memorial complex, Elena Obraztsova commented that this is done to whitewash the Stalinist regime, which has been the purpose of the country’s leadership as a way to “*extinguish the protest moods in society, to distract from the topic of repression.*”⁵⁶

6.5. Why is all this possible - the current public sphere in Russia

To approach the situation in Russia from the point of view of democracy falls short, as Russia is not explicitly trying to be a democracy. It can be very well argued that the imprisonment of Dmitriev and Koltyrin and limiting freedom of speech are undemocratic acts not suitable for an open society, but in the case of Russia democracy is not necessarily an aim considered to be attainable. It should also be understood that the rehabilitation of Stalin is a trend that has gotten stronger during the 2000’s, and there have been times when his legacy has not been appreciated.

⁵⁵ Nastoyashee Vremya: "Произошел классический рейдерский захват" – как в России боролись с единственным музеем истории политических репрессий. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/perm-36/30472321.html> 8.3.2020

⁵⁶ Novaya Gazeta: Похоронная команда <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/08/29/81770-pohoronnaya-komanda> 29.8.2019

During the last decade of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev's Glasnost policies of openness censorship was lifted, which led to unprecedented revelations about the crimes of the Stalin era. Also, in the 1990's under Boris Yeltsin's time there were attempts to dissociate existing official holidays like the Victory Day away from their Stalinist past. As the attempts to develop a "new idea for Russia" seemed futile, the symbolic contest over nationhood was largely left to communists and nationalists, and the Soviet past became an important tool under Vladimir Putin's regime, as the state has been placed above the people. (Vujacic, 2007, 178-179)

What also should be noted, is that Russia is not trying to be a democratic country in a sense it is understood in the West. Therefore, such concepts like open society or freedom of expression are seen in a different light. Even though there were hopes of a transition to democracy after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has faded away from Western democracy norms. This happened in two phases: during Yeltsin's era in the 1990's there was a rhetorical commitment to observe democratic norms, while the real strategy was to build a system whose main purpose was to secure the ruling elite's power. This meant that democratic practices were modified as needed to secure this goal, whereas the official rhetoric remained consistently democratic. This changed after Putin's rise to power in 2000, when undemocratic practices became even more apparent. When Western organizations such as OECD voiced their concern on Russian election irregularities, it was met in Russia with accusing European organizations of double standards and politicized decisions. Another reason for swaying further from Western democracy was the so-called "color revolutions" taking place in post-Soviet countries like Georgia and Ukraine. In order to prevent such from happening, Russia has wanted to eliminate all potential hooks for democratic change domestically and in other semi-authoritarian or authoritarian former Soviet republics. This strategy involves questioning the previously agreed-upon democratic norms and institutionalized practices of European election observation. (Saari, 2009, 747-748)

The Russian concept of democracy was described as "sovereign democracy" by Vladislav Surkov, deputy chief of the Russian presidential administration at the time in 2006. This concept has meaning in both international and domestic arena, as Russia has tried to offer a different interpretation of concepts like freedom, democracy and human rights. In such thinking there is a "norm-exception" dichotomy, where Russia demands exceptional treatment in its foreign relations. In domestic realms such issues like the liberty-security dilemma is understood in a way that precedence is given to legitimizing transgressions of normal policies, including civil liberties. (Makarychev, 2008, 49-56) Russia has a peculiar understanding of democracy, and

the understanding of the state as a strong actor has gotten a good amount of help from the rehabilitation of the Soviet past with its strong leaders. Against this background, it is no wonder that leaders like Stalin are not discredited but rather reminisced selectively and organizations discussing Stalinist repressions like Memorial are facing hard times. In such a system, NGO's are dangerous, as they work outside the government's sphere of influence, and contain a risk of domestic democratic change, just like the various color revolutions have proved.

A descriptive example of this is from 2015, when Russia banned George Soros' pro-democracy charities *Open Society Foundations* and *Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation*, as their activities were deemed to be "undesirable" and they "*represent a threat to the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation and the security of the state.*"⁵⁷ Memorial is no different in this sense, as it aims to promote civil and human rights, and to publish about Soviet Union's totalitarian past. As a foreign agent it has been stigmatized and this status has made its operation difficult. And finally, people like Dmitriev and Koltyrin, who try to keep the public informed about Stalinist crimes are undesirable for the state. If the Soviet past is contested too much from a grassroots level, there is no knowing what might happen. Could it inspire other similar domestic actors? Imprisoning historians and declaring organizations as foreign agents is a clear message, which leaves no room for interpretation. In a country that does not even want to be a democracy sending such messages is not a problem.

Against this background, it is also easier to understand, why Stalin is important in this narrative, as he is very much equated with the glorious aspects of the Soviet history. His popularity has swung from one side to another ever since his death in 1953. First his successor Nikita Khrushchev launched a campaign of denouncing his cult of personality, that was followed by an era of stagnation under Leonid Brezhnev, where Stalin's name just disappeared from the official public discourse. However, a neo-Stalinist sentiment existed in the Soviet society and there was a thriving black-market trade of his portraits. During the 1980's under the perestroika policies of Mikhail Gorbachev the exposure of Stalin's crimes was an important component of the public debates at the time, and by the end of the Soviet Union there was no doubt that these crimes had taken place. During the 1990's Stalin's popularity rose again, even though his crimes had been exposed. As the ex-Soviet population was left disoriented and the whole Soviet project was challenged, people started becoming nostalgic for the Soviet past under the harsh economic

⁵⁷ Reuters: Russia bans George Soros foundation as state security 'threat' <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-soros-idUSL1N13P22Y20151130> 1.12.2015.

realities of the post-Communist Russia, and as a by-product of this neo-Stalinism started regaining popularity. (Chapkovski, 2017, 193-194)

This has also been important in Vladimir Putin's positive and nationalist narrative for modern-day Russia, where the Soviet Union played an important role in the war against fascism and all negative aspects were historically necessary and relatively insignificant when compared to other atrocities. The core idea is that Russia can be proud of its past, and whoever says the contrary is either a foreigner or their ally. (Edele, 2017) Therefore, neo-Stalinism never went away, but has now blended into this positive and nationalistic understanding of history. To draw from Foucault's understanding of *isegoria*, the pro-Stalinist sentiment used to be this kind of expression of free speech in an open discourse, but now as the official narrative is that Russia can be proud about its history and no other views are accepted, these opinions are incorporated in this view automatically.

To set the national pride aside, it is also a peculiar phenomenon that the events that took place after Stalin's death are used as a cautionary example. In November 2020, the Russian State Duma approved a draft law on extending immunity for former presidents in the sense that they would be protected from prosecution concerning both criminal and administrative violations. This created a lot of debate within the Duma, and parliamentary chairman Vyacheslav Volodin stepped in to defend the draft. He argued that this would protect the interests of the country as the person who makes decisions now should feel that *"he is needed not only today but also tomorrow."* He also responded to the criticism by using history as an example: *"I want to emphasize once again: the actions that politicians allowed in the '90s led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The actions that politicians took after Stalin's death, when they crossed out all of his victories and trampled on him, also led to bad consequences, though Stalin was assessed by both the people and historians."*⁵⁸ This statement is very interesting, because it gives away what is feared by the current Russian political elite: if a former leader is assessed from a critical point of view, it can set an example for also assessing their actions. Therefore, Stalin must be protected if they in turn want to stay protected. It is not important to focus on bad and "cross out victories", but rather just focusing on the good achievements.

Since the past can be nothing but glorious, the possibilities to conduct an impartial study into the Soviet history is becoming more and more difficult. Whereas under Boris Yeltsin's time

⁵⁸ Meduza.io: 'Respect the constitution'. Draft law on extending presidential immunity provokes controversy among Russian lawmakers <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/11/18/respect-the-constitution> 18.11.2020.

archives were open for researchers, under Vladimir Putin's term the trend has been towards an opposite direction. In 2016 the Russian Government's Commission on State Secrets refused to declassify documents concerning the work of the Soviet secret services in the period between 1917 to 1991. This was done regardless of a petition signed by 60 thousand Russians on a website *change.org*, which was initiated by a group of lawyers known as "Komanda 29". The petition demanded the declassification of the documents contained in VChK, NKVD and KGB archives. The Commission answered that the information concerning the work of the secret service is still relevant today and their circulation could damage state security. The duration of their classification was continued with 30 more years.⁵⁹

Even though the Commission on State Secrets responded that this disclosure does not concern documents related to mass repressions, which were disclosed in 1992 by a special order given by Boris Yeltsin, critics have noted that many documents are still withheld that are directly related to repressions.⁶⁰ Similar developments are apparent in Russian legislation, as the Yarovaya Act (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) was passed, which criminalized among others the dissemination of knowingly false information on the activities of the USSR during World War II. Nikolay Kopusov has noted that this bill perpetuates the venerable Soviet tradition of censorship and is almost unique among memory laws. Whereas such laws usually intend to protect the memories of the victims of state policy, the Russian version seems to rather protect the memory of the state against that of its victims. Another example of such can be seen in Turkey, where insults to the state are criminalized, and this is used to prevent calling the 1915 massacre of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire a genocide. (Kopusov, 2018, 291-296)

To conclude this chapter, the seemingly local and small conflict among Karelian historians and local administration connects to a bigger picture, which is crucial to understand in order to make sense of what is happening. In the Russian public sphere, everything that reminds of Stalinist crimes, or in general casts a shadow over the Soviet state is deemed unwanted. There are many reasons for this, ranging from creating a positive and proud history to not setting up an example that leaders can be assessed negatively after they are not in power anymore. Sandarmokh is a place, that reminds people of the atrocities committed by the state, and there is no way to create

⁵⁹ Meduza.io: Комиссия по гостайне отказалась рассекречивать архив НКВД

<https://meduza.io/news/2016/01/19/komissiya-po-gostayne-otkazalas-rassekrechivat-arhiv-nkvd> 19.1.2016

⁶⁰ Meduza.io: Методы работы не подлежат раскрытию. Почему ФСБ отказывается выдавать уже рассекреченные документы <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/07/14/metody-raboty-ne-podlezhat-raskrytiyu> 14.7.2015

a heroic discourse concerning it. In today's Russia, where even the law protects the memory of World War II, there are tools to quiet down memories that are not suitable. The imprisonment of Dmitriev and Koltyrin and the excavations conducted by RVIO to move blame to the Finnish Army are tools to "normalize" Sandarmokh, to make it fit the suitable narrative. In the public sphere only certain readings of history are allowed, so Sandarmokh is now moving towards this direction. Dissenting views are silenced, and historians either express views consistent with the state narrative or remain quiet, as they know that they could face the same faith as Dmitriev and Koltyrin.

7. CONCLUSION - THE PAST CANNOT BE ANYTHING BUT GLORIOUS

The events surrounding Sandarmokh are not an isolate chain of events in the sense that larger parallels to societal trends in Russia can be easily drawn. It has been demonstrated in this research that there is a huge difference concerning the memories of Stalinist repressions and World War II. Whereas the first is treated with indifference and it has been difficult to place blame on those responsible for the acts of killing, the latter is seen as a defining moment in the nation's history and the victory is due to the actions of the state and its people, who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Therefore, both agentless and agent interpretations are evident when these historical periods are discussed. The essentiality of World War II has become more and more considerable under the rule of Vladimir Putin, who has presented its importance even in *The National Interest*, an American journal. He sees that there can be no other ways to discuss the war than a triumph. All other arguments are Western falsification, that are to desecrate history of the Russian nation. Putin does not deny the fact that political repressions indeed took place in the 1930's, but he discusses them as if they were some kind of natural disaster, "*a tragedy for our people*". It is left completely out of the discussion how the Soviet political system had a well-organized machine of repression, and nothing happened by a chance.

The main reason for this is that post-Soviet Russia needs a historical event, which can be used politically. A memory of victory over fascism after facing very hard times together as a nation under a strong leader is perfect for a country, that lost its status as a superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union and faced difficult times in the 1990's. The Stalinist repressions on the other hand seem to be forgotten, and according to sociological surveys the younger generations tend to have a more positive image of Stalin. There is a stark contrast between "nothing is forgotten" and a "historical amnesia". The Stalinist repressions do not offer any glorious narratives, but internal violence perpetuated by the state. This casts a huge shadow over Stalin, and it does not fit the image of him as a great military leader. This is the reason why the repressions are commemorated in a modest way and are kept away from the public discourse as much as possible. They happened but are either just ignored or even belittled in the sense that many doubt whether the number of perished people is exaggerated, or if some

foreign occupiers executed Soviet prisoners on sites that are thought to be burial grounds for victims of internal terror.

Sandarmokh is a place where these two memories coincide, and it is not by a chance that this has happened. Whereas it used to be solely a memorial site for thousands of executed victims of political repressions, some Russian historians and RVIO have brought the memory of World War II there based on controversial evidence. The main aim is to distort the memory of political repressions and move attention to World War II. It is a much better narrative that Finns executed Soviet prisoners in the 1940's in Sandarmokh. From the point of view of memory politics this can be seen in the form of certain practices. First of all, from the point of view of history the historical memory of World War II is given precedence over the memory of Stalinist repressions in the public discourse. Historians, who support the hypothesis that Finns executed Soviet prisoners on the site are given precedence over those who do not. The political aspect of this comes into play when it is assessed, who can make policies based on historical events. If one is able to do this, then one holds political power. The way this has manifested itself in Russian society is for example through legislation that prohibits disseminating false information about World War II, or in the way that organizations like Memorial are declared as foreign agents. Part of this is also the imprisonment of historians Dmitriev and Koltyrin, who both were against the new theories concerning Sandarmokh.

The way the discourses concerning Sandarmokh are regulated is best understood by using the Foucauldian methods of discourse analysis. He saw that discourse has external and internal processes, which regulate it. From the outset historians like Dmitriev and Koltyrin are excluded from the discussion, and their imprisonment sends a clear message to other historians. Only those can participate in the discussion surrounding Sandarmokh, who possess the right kind of opinions. From processes of internal control, the most essential is granting a certain text major position, which in this case echoes the Russian state's understanding of history, that can for example be seen in President Putin's text about World War II published in *The National Interest*. Historians, who make commentaries referring to these views have the right to speak. The Russian media by and large distorts the discussion around Sandarmokh and speaks of RVIO's findings as if they were nothing but sensational and discredits Memorial, Dmitriev and Koltyrin. The news stories that were referenced in the research almost all speak about those investigating Stalinist crimes as allies of the West. This is one way how the post-truth discussion

manifests itself in Russia, as facts are not important, they are rather equated with opinions based on futile evidence.

It seems that the past in Russia cannot be anything but glorious. Sandarmokh is one example of a memorial site, that is transformed through distortion to be not solely about the memory of political repressions, just like has happened with other such commemorative sites like Perm-36 or Mednoe. The past that such sites represent is not glorious, so they must be changed to remind about the war, so that people do not think of internal violence when visiting these sites but the glorious fight that was won thanks to their ancestors. In addition to providing the nation with a history to be proud of, another reason is that if Stalin is assessed in a negative manner for his crimes, it can at some point happen to the current political elite, should they not be in power anymore. This is why the Russian State Duma is discussing granting immunity to former presidents, and even using as a warning example what happened after Stalin's death. Sandarmokh is thus neutralized, and historians who worked there for decades with the aim of bringing justice to those who died are now swept out of sight. The memory of a nation matters, just as what is left out of it.

All this seems like a hopeless situation from the point of view of non-biased historical discussion, but not all hope is lost. Dmitriev and Koltyrin indeed took a risk when voicing their opinions, and *parrhesia* always includes this risk even if one is saying the truth. They faced severe consequences due to this in a society, where *isegoria* seems to rule. In Russia opinions and all kind of arguments can run wild if they support the view of the state. *Isegoria* allows all kind of nonsense to be said, whereas *parrhesia* is not a right but a quality of speech that is more valuable and even risky to its utterer. What happened to Dmitriev and Koltyrin is a proof that their *parrhesiastic* speech had to be excluded, because it reveals the shortcomings and false claims made by state-supported historians and RVIO. However, the case of Dmitriev has been noted all over the world and his *parrhesiastic* speech has made him known and respected. It is understood, why he is imprisoned. For many Russians this is also obvious, like the statements made by Memorial and colleagues of Dmitriev and Koltyrin prove. It remains to be seen how long this kind of memory politics continue in Russia and whether it will continue to be successful, but not everybody is buying it. This is why there is a glimmer of hope in a difficult situation.

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