

# Stalinism, Memory and Commemoration: Russia's dealing with the past

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In the last twenty-five years there has been a significant change in the way political communities deal with their past. A "national" policy of remembrance, which highlights the heroic deeds of its members, commemorates its own victims and crimes inflicted by other entities, and forgets about crimes committed in the name of one's own community seems to be replaced by a "post-national" policy of remembrance. In several countries dealing with the dark sides of one's history has become a significant *topos* within a policy of remembrance and cultural commemoration. In contrast, a country like Russia refuses to step into this process of establishing a new post-national *régime d'historicité* and refers to history only in order to strengthen its national identity: While remembering its effort in defeating Germany in the "Great Fatherland War," Russian society forgets about the trauma of the Gulag and crimes committed in its name in other former states of the Soviet Union. My paper argues that the specific setting of Russia's official policy of remembrance is due to the notion of a society of heroes once forcibly institutionalized as the constitutive historiographical principle by Stalin's regime. Regarding to the discourse in the field of memory such a forced interconnection between historiography and memory could be characterized as »occupied memory«. Although Russia's official policy of remembrance passed through several quite different phases, nowadays, however, a critical approach to Russia's past has been replaced by a "patriotic consensus" that expresses a new – or better – an old Russian concept of identity.

## I. Introduction

There is a deep connection between WWII, the Great Fatherland War, as the Russians refer to it, and the Gulag Archipelago in the memory of Russia.<sup>1</sup> Solzhenitsyn seems to have this connection in mind when he refers to a Russian saying in the prolog of his book on the "GULag Archipelago." The first part of this Russian saying says: "No don't! Don't dig up the past! Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye" (Solzhenitsyn, 1985, pp. xvi).

In what follows I will try to explain why the "way of remembering" WWII and misremembering the mass crimes and victims of the Gulag are directly connected with one another. What is meant by "way of remembering?" The experiences of WWII for Russia are, as Maria Ferretti puts it, "tragic ambivalent" (Ferretti, 2005, pp. 47). It is striking that the official remembrance of WWII is possible only in the framework of a heroic story.

Neither is there space for events like Katyn,<sup>2</sup> the fear of death of the soldiers, Stalin's inhuman military commands, nor is there a chance to interpret the war itself in another framework. The situation of the *frontoviki* (guerillas), for instance, could also be interpreted in terms of free self-determination rather than unquestioned military obedience and trust in the unlimited capability of the military leader. Anyhow, that's not the case in Russia. I will argue that the way of dealing with WWII on the one hand and the Gulag on the other can be explained by the role and function they are playing within the context of Russian cultural memory.

In order to explicate this role and function, I will refer to the theoretical debates on memory and history, and elaborate on the structural difference between a democratic culture of commemoration and a totalitarian one. What is characteristic for a totalitarian culture of commemoration is a so-called "occupied memory" (Arnold, 1998, pp. 18). Afterwards I will elucidate that the specific setting of Russia's official policy of remembrance is due to the notion of a society of heroes once forcibly institutionalized as the constitutive historiographical principle by Stalin's regime. Although Russia's official policy of remem-

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<sup>1</sup> Gulag is both, an acronym for *Glavnoje Upravlenije Ispravitelno-trudovykh Lagerej i kolonij* which means the „Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies“ and a synonym for the Soviet system of repression existing of forced labor camps, penal camps, prisons etc. Although camps had existed in the tsar empire and under Lenin's regime as well, the quality of those camps changed in 1929 when Stalin came to power. The number of people who died in the Gulag differ tremendously from source to source. However, it is estimated today that around 20 Million people were killed or died in these camps between 1929 and 1953 (Stalin's death).

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<sup>2</sup> Katyn is a synonym for the killing of thousands of Polish military officers, Polish policemen, intellectuals and civilian prisoners by the Soviet secret police (NKVD) in the early 1940s in a forest close to the Russian city Katyn. In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev for the first time formally expressed profound regret and admitted Soviet secret police responsibility

branch passed through several quite different phases, however, there is neither room for mourning, contemplation, nor reflection for the victims of the regime.

## II. Memory, historiographical iterations and the totalitarian state

Remembrance, past or memory are anything but clear and easy concepts; they are ambivalent and difficult to deal with. Properly speaking, neither memory nor “the past” exist per se. Memory, remembrance, or “the past” are results of an ongoing, conscious, or unconscious process of narrative construction which is initiated, guided or perhaps even controlled by various actors and multipliers. Moreover, there are at least as many different designs of memory or remembrance as individuals living in one society. Nevertheless, one could speak of something like “collective memory” in order to express similar or even congruent approaches towards the past which could be identified within a society.

The philosophical discussion about this social dimension of memory starts with Nietzsche. In the *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche maintained that it is the process of memory-formation that enables an individual to overcome the pure subjectivity of his or her own interests and to enter into social commitments (Nietzsche, 1972a). More than fifty years later, in his studies on the social dimension of memory, Maurice Halbwachs revealed how individual memory is constituted through communication with other members of society and by belonging to a certain group, such as family or neighborhood. It was Halbwachs who introduced the concept of collective memory and defined it as a shared account of the past by a group of people (Halbwachs 1992). However, for Halbwachs, the collective memory of a certain group was bound in space and time. By releasing memory from these ties by means of symbols and cultural molding, Pierre Nora enhanced the theory of memory. The idea of a nation as an abstract community defining its self-perception by transcending time and space with symbols and cultural codes is rooted at the core of Nora’s thinking on memory (Nora, 1990). In his studies on “cultural memory,” Jan Assmann specifies the idea of memory and replaces the mystic term “collective memory” by a more precise concept: for Assmann there are two different types of memory within a community – “communicative” and “cultural memory.” While “communicative memory” is fairly un-organized, unstructur-

ed and formed by communication of every day life situations, cultural memory is distant from every day life and is constituted by cultural molding – such as texts, rites, or memorials, as well as institutionalized communication such as recitation, solemnization, or contemplation. The self-perception of a nation, for Assmann, derives from the content of its cultural memory (Assmann, 1988; Assmann, 1995).

However, Pierre Nora maintains that remembrance also works by projecting, by tuning out, by repressing one aspect for the sake of another. In short: the way “cultural memory” works could be far from being “objective,” from serving justice. Aleida Assmann refers to this problem by distinguishing the concept of memory into the special tasks memory could perform: On the one hand, Aleida Assmann mentions the “functional memory” or “inhabited memory” (Assmann & Aleida, 1995). This kind of memory is linked to a special group or institution and is concerned with the creation of meaning as well as with guiding the process of identity-formation for a certain community. “Functional memory” is quite selective in choosing aspects of the past as worth remembering: Only those aspects of history are taken into account, which are crucial for the creation of meaning. “Functional memory” ignores all those events which are less or not important or sometimes even dangerous for the self-understanding of a community. The job of the “functional memory” is to convey values, which can help to design a community, to sustain identity, and to provide norms for acting. On the other hand Aleida Assmann introduces the term “uninhabited memory” or “storage memory.” “Storage memory” radically separates between past, present, and future and ignores all norms and values. Aleida Assmann speaks of this kind of memory as a “stuffed and dusty storeroom,” as a “memory of memories,” (Assmann & Aleida, 1995) or uses the metaphor of a “historical archive.”

This historical archive stores information for the use of specialists. An archive is not a museum; it is not designed for public access and popular presentations. It differs from what is publicly exposed in the same way that great museums show differ from array of objects in the stuffed storerooms in the subterranean tracts of museums. There is, of course, some order and arrangement [...] too, but it is one that ensures only the retrieval of information, not an intellectually or emotionally effective display. The archive, in other words, is not a form of presentation

but of preservation; it collects and stores information, it does not arrange, exhibit, process, or interpret it." (Assmann & Aleida, 2006, pp. 270)

*Among artists, curators of museums, etc. it is the task of the historians to transform these different kinds of information into knowledge; to dig up long-forgotten sources, to make visible and create effective frames of attention for stuff that had long remained beyond the scope of interest. In other words, the storage memory where historians rely on is "pure potential, a possible source of information, nothing more." By drawing a distinction between storing and the creation of meaning, historiography for Assmann becomes one form of cultural memory. Moreover, by doing so, Assmann overcomes the separation of history and memory – as it adheres in the work of Nietzsche, Halbwachs, and Nora. The relation between history and memory is not interpreted as a dualistic opposition anymore but rather as a perspective relation. What should be meant by perspective relation?*

By linking "functional memory" with "storage memory," the creation of meaning and the formation of identity is not completely dissolved from a rational discourse. To be more precise: on the one hand there is open discourse which is first and foremost concerned with the question of historical "truth" or a more adequate presentation and perception of historical events. On the other hand, linking the creation of meaning and formation of identity with historiography provides the justified possibility that the "cultural memory" of a community is able to change.

To sum up: In communities, for instance, in modern democracies, with a critical historiography – with an open and controversial discourse on history (or at least the possibility to it), with a process one could describe according to Seyla Benhabib as "*historiographical iterations*"<sup>3</sup> where "principles and norms are reappropriated and reiterated" (Benhabib, 2004, pp. 113) by all participants in the discourse on history and the past – mythologisation of the past could be prevented. In such communities the process of identity-formation and self-perception can only be proceed on the ground of discussion with and in challenge by the discourse, which is ta-

king place in historiography and all historical sciences respectively.

Since in the Soviet Union historiography was guided by anything but an open discourse, Sabine Arnold, following Aleida Assmann, characterizes the memory in totalitarian states as an "occupied memory" (Arnold, 1998, pp. 18). The concept of "occupied memory" refers to the repressive and manipulating control of the process of memory-formation by state authorities. In totalitarian states the purpose of history is to embed the present community in a long, mighty, honorable and glorious tradition, which should bind the members of the community to this tradition. Historical events which support this purpose are conserved by cultural molding and a policy of remembrance; while those events disturbing the designated image of memory of the totalitarian state are removed and destructured by revised history. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt gives an illuminating example for the revised history of totalitarian states when she points to the power it takes to rewrite the history of the Russian Revolution in such a way that in the end "no man by the name of Trotsky was ever commander-in-chief of the Red Army" (Arendt, 1994, pp. 356).

By means of a manipulative approach towards history every member of the community is forced to follow a certain set of norms of action; norms which determine each member's place in the community. The difference between storage and revision on the one hand and identity-formation and creation of meaning is dissolved in case of an occupied memory. The access to archives is restricted or prohibited. Under these circumstances historiography is just producing myths for the sake of a certain notion of identity instead of undermining them.

In the Soviet Union, under Stalin's command, historiography became a means to establish a certain notion of identity upon the community. Due to the amalgamation of historiography and memory in the totalitarian Soviet Union, it is possible by unfolding those principles on which identity should be created and which historiography has to obey, to disclose the logic of the culture of commemoration.

### III. Determining Historiography

A close look at Stalinist historiography reveals the above-mentioned occupation of memory. The fundamental rearrangement of the way of teaching history at school as well as the reopen-

<sup>3</sup> At this point I rely on Seyla Benhabib's concept of "democratic iteration" and I refer this concept to the discourse on history and memory (Benhabib, 2004).

ing of the departments of history relies on a resolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from 15 March 1934. Due to this resolution the idea of Marxism-Leninism was more or less replaced by a patriotic reorientation: the concept of "soviet patriotism" was established as an ideological principle of historiography, therefore, it became the duty of every historian and each person who deals with matters of historical interests to interpret the past in such a way that the patriotic feelings and emotions were encouraged, that it showed the heroic tradition every member of the present community is embedded and that positive values and norms could be derived from former historical events. If at all, the scientific standard was of secondary importance (Geyer, 1985).

Due to this reform the so-called "Fatherlands history" covers the history of all nations and people who have ever lived on the territory of the Soviet Union and traces back to the oldest times. However, since Russia and its history is abrogated in the history of the Soviet Union, there is no history of Russia within the scope of the "Fatherland history" at all – as a history of the Ukraine, for example, is. To sum up, the "Fatherlands history" or the history of the Soviet Union meant nothing else than historiography in continuity with the Russian empire. The history of all non-Russian peoples and communities of the Soviet Union appears as a mere attachment to the "great tradition" of Russia.

However, placing the Soviet Union in the tradition of the Russian empire helps to establish one ethnic paradigm at the ground of historiography: *narodnost*. The idea of *narodnost*, which means a set of values and norms characterizing the ethnic-national customs and ethnic-national culture of Russia could be regarded as the heart of Russian nationalism. *Narodnost*, as Renner puts it, is the summation of all non-governmental attributes of the nation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the so-called "Slavophiles" opposed *narodnost* to the western ideal of individualism on the one hand and to the notion of patriotism given by tsar empire on the other. One out of many important aspects of the guiding principle of society is the concept *sobornost*. *Sobornost* expresses a strong feeling of "togetherness" or "integrality." The term was coined by *Slavophiles* to underline the need for cooperation between people at the expense of the western idea of individualism. Supplemented by the principle of *celostnost*, which stands for the idea of thinking and feeling in holistic terms, both aspects of

*narodnost* express the culture of consent of a rural-patriarchic Russia. Cultural autonomy (*samobytnost*) and the need to become a great power (*dseriawa*) are further crucial aspects of *narodnost* (Renner, 2000). Both refer to the myth of "Moscow as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rome" which deals with the legitimacy for this claim to be or to become a super power. Obedience to authorities (*samoderzavie*) is another aspect of *narodnost*. Without a strong government or political leader, as Simon put it, the Russian states proved to be unable to govern Russian society (Simon, 1995).

With all means of cultural molding (historiography, history lessons, monuments etc.), Stalin's regime established *narodnost* as the guiding principle of historiography – a principle which reflects the historical reality of the social organization of Russia on the one hand and helps to structure the cultural memory of the country for decades on the other. Since historiography was degenerated to a means of identity formation and creation of meaning examining the idea of *narodnost* gives an adequate illustration of the soviet culture of commemoration: state-worshipping, anti-individualism, obedience to authorities, and nationalism. Although Stalin's regime was able to establish structures in cultural memory which support their claim for domination the question remains with what kind of content these structures should be filled with? In other words, how could social cohesion be provided?

#### IV. Bound by a society of heroes

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution the political leaders faced the question of how to motivate the people to join the project of Russia's social reorganization? Maxim Gorky seems to give an adequate answer with his comments on heroes symbolized by the proleletariat. This notion of a hero which is, as Guenther puts it "an indispensable element of every totalitarian culture" (Guenther, 1993, pp. 7) combines all appealing and aggressive energy which was regarded to be necessary to mobilize the masses of people. Influenced by Nietzsche's superman, the Russian folklore movement, Marx and the "literary romantic," Gorky characterizes the new Russian man as a self-sacrificing fighter for a better world – a man acting only for the sake of the community and by doing so emancipating himself (Guenther, 1994).

By establishing the canon of values of socialist realism as the aesthetic paradigm for literature, art, and culture at the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet regime was able to produce heroes *ad libitum*. Moreover, the regime could characterize these heroes in such a way that they fit into the political efforts and requirements they want to accomplish. Since 1934 the Soviet hero cult was institutionalized systematically.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of establishing the hero cult in society the political instrumentalization of the Second World War has been paramount. WWII, the Great Fatherland War, not only marks the take-off of this political instrumentalization, but the remembrance of dead soldiers in particular and WWII in general undoubtedly crown the approach of hero-worshipping, too. With their deaths the soldiers lost their individual characters and were stylized into supra-individual heroic persons who lost their lives relying upon the unlimited capability of the military leader, the future of the Soviet Union, the values it represents, and its cultural supremacy. Although the soldiers became the most significant subject of the soviet hero myth, my few remarks have already shown that this illustration of the soldiers fit into the structure of the cultural memory designed by Stalinist historiography. Events and facts like the Hitler/Stalin-pact, the killing of the polish officers in Katyn, the fear of death of the soldiers, the brutalization in war, the lousy military equipment, the lack of food, and innumerable suicide squads, do not make their way into Russian historiography.

Although the way of dealing with the soldiers in the context of hero-worshipping slightly changed in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party where mass-heroism was initially propagated, WWII still holds the highest rank in the soviet conception of history. Friedrich Kuebart for example outlines to what extent the 20th anniversary of the Soviet victory caused an enormous stir of patriotic activity – especially for pupils and young people. Field trips to battlefields and visiting former soldiers of the Red Army allowed kids and young people to familiarize with the fundamental historical impact of the Great Fatherland War and its deeper meaning for the history of the Soviet Union. Almost every school became a sponsor of a former soldier who was invited to give a talk and tell his story on official Remembrance Days. However, mourning, contemplation, and reflection were suppressed by the demand of stren-

gth, optimism, obedience and the fulfillment of duty (Kuebart, 1967). Again, the hero cult deals as the crucial means. Especially in the aftermath of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party, the foundation of veteran's organizations was pushed forward. Firstly, commemorating should be organized on a broader scale. Secondly, Khrushchev's regime wanted to enhance the status of the masses at the expense of Stalin. Mass-heroism gained access into everyday life: shiftworking became as heroic as holding a volunteer position. In return for their "heroic deeds" workers were pictured in administrative facilities, schools and universities, factories and even next to highways. In the Soviet Union heroic deeds belong to everyday life. Of course, propagating mass heroism became possible because of the economic prosperity of 1960s and 1970s. However, conveyed by all kinds of means of education and propaganda, as Sabine Arnold puts it, the hero cult framed the individual and collective self-consciousness of three generations.

Since Marxian terminology was far from being sufficient to mobilize society, Gorky's hero myth deals as the "decisive promoter of consciousness-building" (Arnold, 1998, pp. 9) in order to internalize and repeat patriotic emotions, feelings and meaningful identities. The "agitation to happiness" (Guenther, 1994) was based upon concepts such as loyalty, nationhood, the Fatherland, homeland, mold, or blood bond which were formed to a conglomerate of norms – formed by a terminology which is more accessible than a Marxian terminology (Geyer, 19-85). Stylized to heroes the soldiers of WWII easily and accessibly incorporate loyalties, emotions and procedures demanded by the regime. The soldiers of WWII represented the prototype of the *homo sovieticus*, as Ignatow maintains, and additionally they show a remarkable similarity with the ideal of the traditional Russian man (Ignatow, 1999).

To summarize, the cultural memory – which was an "occupied memory" – was determined in two ways: on the one hand, by establishing *narodnost* as the guiding principle of historiography Stalin's regime structures the cultural memory in a hierarchical way that maintains the cultural and historical supremacy of Russia, as well as the duty that everybody has to subordinate his life to the needs of the nation and the cohesion of the country. From this follows that remembrance of WWII is only possible in terms of obedience, belief in the political leaders and authorities and sacrificing oneself for the sake of

Russia. Remembering the experience of the guerillas, for instance, in terms of creativity, free thinkers who disobey senseless commands and who arrange their way of living and surviving separated from the “helpful” control of the military leaders did not and does not fit into the hierarchical structure of Russia’s cultural memory. On the other hand, the remembrance of the soldiers not only had to follow a certain structure; it also had to fulfill an emotional purpose: as heroes the soldiers should represent all the necessary values such as strength, optimism, pure hearts of patriotism, undaunted by death, and so on. The Great Fatherland War should symbolize all the attitudes which are necessary to build up a glorious future of the Soviet Union (Plaggenborg, 2001). Due to the special setting of the content there was no space for mourning, tears and trauma in the cultural memory of Russia. In short: Historiography of the Soviet Union combined a hierarchical structure with value-formatting and emotional substance: the hero myth.

#### V. The Gulag and the “Holes of oblivion”

But where are the victims of the Gulag – the victims of Stalinism? In what follows I will give two different answers to this question: the first answer is directly linked to the status of WWII in the cultural memory of Russia and the notion of a society of heroes. For the second answer, I will follow Dan Diner and point to the special setting and arrangement of the Gulag as a mass crime. However, I will show how these two different approaches to the question of misremembering the Gulag could be linked together today.

The existence of the Gulag does not fit into the picture of society of heroes at all. I just want to give one brief but illuminative example – but of course there are many since every form of domination needs some support by the people; otherwise it could not exist for years. The example comes from Hannah Arendt. Again, in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt maintains that denouncing friends became a crucial mean to confirm ones loyalty with the regime. Moreover, denouncing somebody provides circumstantial evidence which brings an accusation of non-existent crimes (Arendt, 1994). Due to this shameful cooperation between the regime and the people the heroic deeds of the Great Fatherland War seem to be more pleasant to remember. Beyond official policy undoubtedly it is more pleasant to remember the heroic deeds of

defeating Nazi-Germany in the Great Fatherland War and to join the project of building up “true socialism” than flipping the dark chapter of the Gulag open and facing one’s own possible responsibility. In 1885, Nietzsche had already pointed to this kind of mechanism in *Beyond good and evil*: “I have done that’ says my memory. I could not have done that – says my pride and remains implacable. Finally, my memory gives up” (Nietzsche, 1972b, pp. 71).

However, by comparing letters of former soldiers with the interviews they gave many years later, Sabine Arnold elaborates that memory – at least the individual one – is able to give up only to a certain extent. While reporting from war situations the soldiers’ remembrances are swept away and repressed by official gilded memories and their special language. Retrospectively, the former desire for safety and well-being which became apparent in the letters is replaced by the language of the regime – camaraderie and front solidarity. Nevertheless, at the same time Arnold discovers that due to experienced fear of death, for instance, there are layers in the individual memory which are resistant against those manipulating approaches of state-heroism and which appear to them in their dreams.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Soviet Union’s or Russia’s official policy of remembrance in regard to the crimes of Stalinism and the Communist Party passed through several quite different phases: under Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s reigning periods of de- and re-Stalinization alternated. The resolution from October 8<sup>th</sup> 1959, regarding the history lessons at schools gives some interesting information on the policy of remembrance of those days. Although the teachers are asked to separate Stalin’s regime from the tradition and historical function of the communist party, the fundamental idea and principle of historiography, *narodnost*, remained untouched. Rather, history lessons at schools and universities should maintain the role of the masses as the true creators of history and the Communist Party as the leading, controlling and directing power of soviet society. A procommunist approach at the beginning of *glasnost* and *perestroika* with emphasis on demonizing Stalin for the sake of the communist movement was removed by an anticommunist, one which resulted in the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, however, a critical approach to Russia’s past has been replaced by a “patriotic consensus” (Sperling, 2001) that expresses a new

– or old – Russian concept of identity relying on the idea of *narodnost*. The supposed glorious times of Russia and the Soviet Union – such as the pre-Revolutionary times of the tsar empire, the social, scientific and cultural achievements of Communism and, of course, the “Great Fatherland War” – serve as a fix-point of orientation for a better future. For this purpose, the political instrumentalization of WWII is crucial, because the official interpretation should provide those values which are supposed to help in achieving this better future of a powerful Russia which includes obedience, belief in the political leader (Putin-cult), social and political cohesion, feeling of togetherness, the glorious nation etc. This one-dimensional interpretation of WWII – by playing down the historical impact and moral dimension of the Gulag – is implemented by a policy of remembrance: the access to archives is possible only to a very limited degree, the design of school books is in accordance with political interests, major parts of the press are controlled by government and other possible actors in the field of a policy of remembrance trying to draw another, a different picture of history – such as the *Society Memorial*<sup>4</sup> – suffer tremendously from state oppression.

Among the effectiveness of hero myth, Dan Diner puts emphasis on another reason for misremembering the Gulag: For Diner the logic of individual memory is relevant to a lesser extent; rather he points to the preconditions which are necessary to constitute something like a common memory of a group. Following Halbwachs, Diner maintains the connection between memory and the self-perception as a group of people. Seeing from this perspective it is crucial that dealing with the Gulag primarily results in a critique of Stalin’s regime; while in contrast, in the case of the Holocaust the German nation is the central point of reference: For Nazi-Germany, regime and nation coincide. Therefore, one could speak of the Nazi crimes as German crimes and the Holocaust is classified as genocide done by the German nation. By contrast, the crimes of Stalinism, as Diner puts it, are classified as crimes by the regime against the own population. Since Stalin’s coming to power the Soviet Union has been a community of perpetrators and victims, and, additionally, this relation

becomes more complex since the perpetrators of today became the victims of tomorrow – and the other way round: In the course of Stalin’s periodical purges those parts of party officers often were eliminated who had been responsible for the elimination of others before (Diner, 1995). Moreover, reports from the camps expose that one cannot speak of unconditional solidarity among the camp’s prisoner at all. Those women who were accused for sedition quite often became victims of rape and sexual abuse by other camp’s prisoners (Lewin, 2001).

Another aspect is the fact that the justification of the mass crimes of Stalinism are given on social ground. Certain groups, such as Kulaks, Trotskyist, critical *intelligenzija* etc. were destroyed due to their social position. In contrast, the Nazis annihilated people like Jews, Slavs, Sinti and Romanies on racial ground. As an Aryan – and under the precondition of not opposing the regime – one could feel safe. In Stalinism pure arbitrariness ruled under which not even Stalin himself could feel safe. For the Stalinist terror, therefore, one can say that no specific group of victims faces a definite nameable group of perpetrators. For Diner, this kind of internal regime crimes asks for a complete other discourse of remembrance than in case of a community is accused for mass crimes by another one (Diner, 1995). Accordingly, the divergent remembrance of the Shoah and the Gulag point to the high significance of questions like *who* is remembering, *what* kind of events are remembered and in *which* tradition of commemoration the community is embedded, for establishing a certain historical narrative at the roots the political community (Diner, 1996) political community (Diner, 1996) Today, however, this setting of remembrance seems to change. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union several countries like Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states, etc. try to establish the remembrances of the crimes of the Soviet Union as one pillar of their new national self-understanding and use it to build up their national identity. It seems obvious that in these countries the nationalization or ethnicization of the remembrance of the Gulag challenge the Russian approach to establish WWII as a normative fix point in Russian history. Again, this shows how Gulag and WWII are directly bound together in the cultural memory of Russia.

<sup>4</sup> The *Society Memorial* is a Russian non-governmental human rights organizations and it is one of the most important agents in the field of memory and remembrance. Memorial was founded by Andrei Sacharow in 1988.

## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, I drew a very rough picture of the setting of the cultural memory of Russia and of the agents and multipliers influencing it. One cannot deny that compared to Stalinism the occupation of memory eased during Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's reigns, the intensity of terror decreased and that this gave rise to the old Russian tradition of *samizdat* – as an alternative to the official memory (Hosking, 1989). The *Samizdat* not only was the basis for *Memorial*, it also reveals that there is another Russian tradition and culture maintaining discourse, disagreement and free speech in Russian terms – and not in Western terms per se – buried or half-buried by state-authorities during decades. *Memorial* knows that telling another story and giving realm to other stories of those years during WWII not only is a historiographical but also a democratic project.

At the beginning of my paper I referred to Solzhenitsyn and the first part of the Russian proverb. I said that it characterizes the way of Russian's dealing with the past. In almost the same manner the second and last part of the proverb fits with the consequences emerging from such a way of dealing with the past; because the proverb goes on to say: "Forget the past and you'll lose both eyes" (Solzhenitsyn, 1985, pp. xvi).

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