

20th Century Mass Graves

Proceedings of the International Conference Tbilisi, Georgia, 15 to 17 October 2015

Matthias Klingenberg / Arne Segelke (Editors)

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DVV International
Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit des
Deutschen Volkshochschul-Verbandes e. V.
Obere Wilhelmstraße 32, 53225 Bonn, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)228 97569-0 / Fax: +49 (0)228 97569-55
info@dvv-international.de / www.dvv-international.de

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Responsible: Christoph Jost

Editors: Matthias Klingenberg/Arne Segelke

Managing Editor: Gisela Waschek

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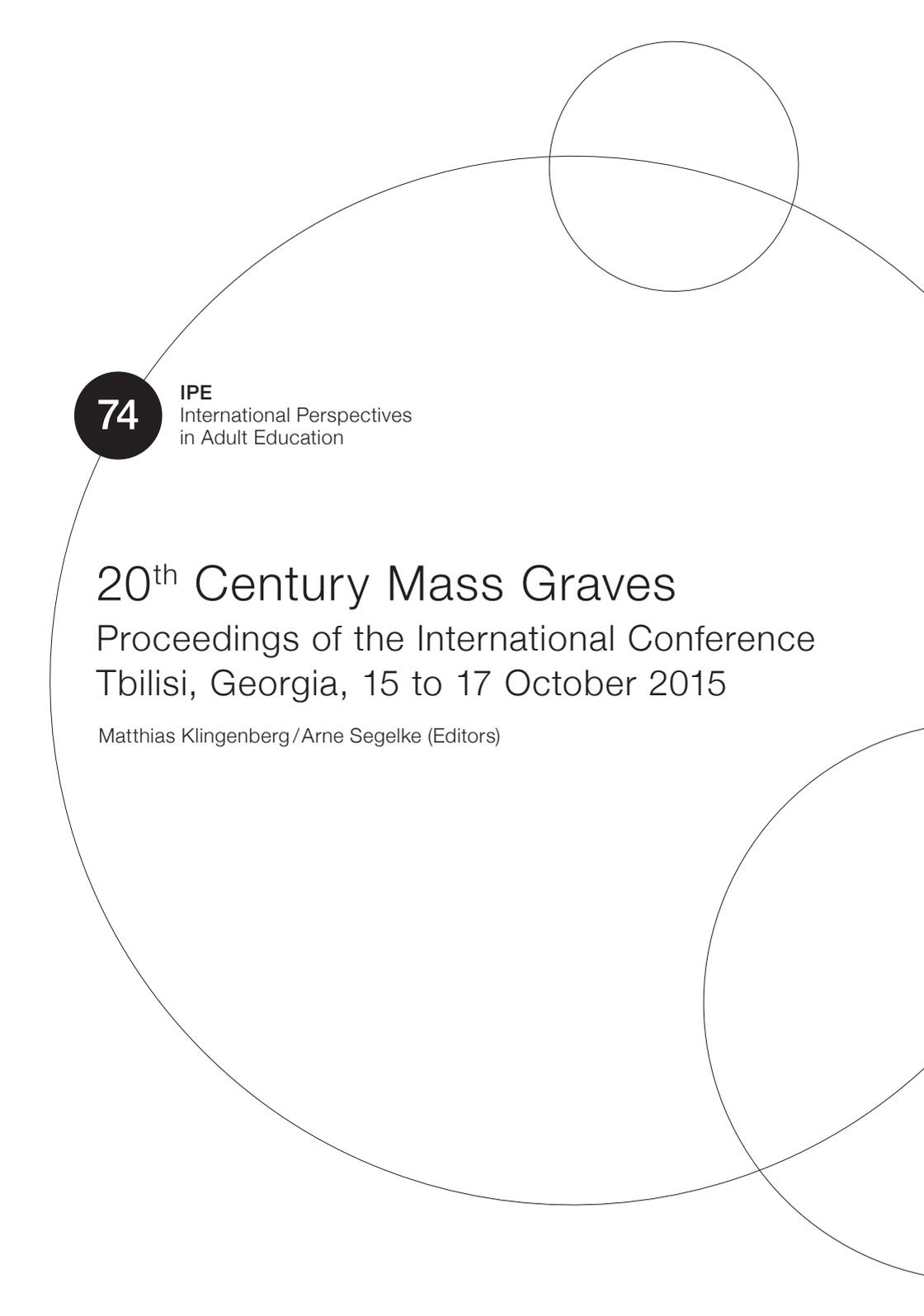
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International Perspectives
in Adult Education

20th Century Mass Graves

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Contents

Editorial 5

History, violence and mass graves

Mihran Dabag

Construction by destruction – Ideological dimensions of collective violence in the 20th century 9

Arne Segelke

Mass graves, violent events and history education 20

Mass graves in Georgia

Bernd Bonwetsch/Marc Junge

Georgia on its way – record of a research project 27

Vanya Ivanova / Matthias Klingenberg

About the absence of the present: Mass graves of the Stalin era in Georgia 36

Irakli Khvadagiani

Looking for lost graves in Georgia – The example of Saburtalo 51

Mass graves in other countries: Poland, Russia and Cambodia

Justyna Sawicka

Source material and archaeological research regarding victims of the communist terror during the years 1944-1956 in Poland 63

Łukasz Szleszkowski

Exhumations of the remains of the victims of post-war repressions in Poland 73

Mikhail Rozhanskiy

From *The Mystery of Kilometre 10* to *The Moon King's Cottage* 82

Long Khet

Local Memory Initiative in Cambodia 98

Images of mass graves

Roma Sendyka

Landscapes of fear – cultural and societal responses to
vegetation on contested and abandoned killing sites 113

Ansgar Gilster

Beyond the Monuments – Photographing the “forgotten”
sites of the Holocaust 121

List of authors 129

Titles of volumes available 133

Editorial

Mass graves form an unusual topic for a volume on adult education. The articles collected in this volume are based on presentations given at a conference on the issue of mass graves in Tbilisi, Georgia, in October 2015. Though conferences on genocide and violence are held on a regular basis, conferences on mass graves are rare events – despite the fact that mass graves can be found in most countries around the world and offer valuable insights into the interconnection between history, memory and sites. Still, working with mass graves is no easy task, since they result from violent events which inflicted pain, loss and trauma on individuals, communities and societies. Yet tackling such difficult aspects of history can help in coming to terms with the past and may even assist in preventing similar events in the future.

The conference which forms the background for this volume was intended as a meeting ground for experts on mass graves from various countries and professional backgrounds. Historians, archaeologists, forensic experts, members of NGOs, ethnologists, museologists and adult educators gathered in Tbilisi to discuss their work and specific knowledge on mass graves. Since DVV International – as organiser of the conference – supports the search for Soviet-era mass graves in Georgia and Armenia, special attention was given to the search for Soviet-era mass graves in post-communist countries. Field excursions and a photographic exhibition accompanied the conference, while the city of Tbilisi provided an ideal setting, great Georgian hospitality and sunny weather.

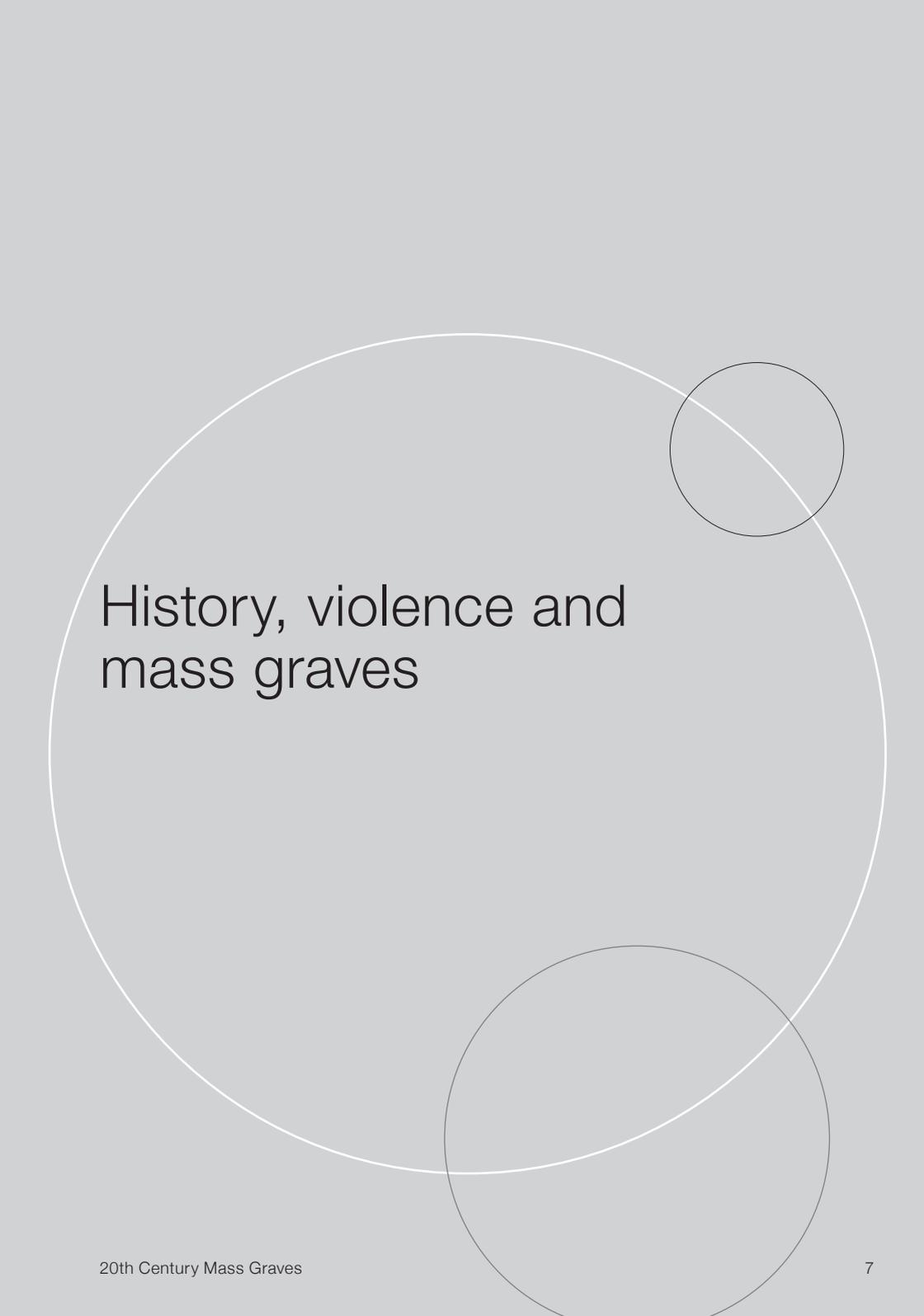
This volume includes contributions by participants of the conference and reflects some of the ideas and issues discussed there. The keynote of the conference was given by Mihran Dabag, founding Director of the Institute for Diaspora and Genocide Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum. In his article, professor Dabag analyses how perpetrators justified massive state violence during the 20th Century by declaring it a tool for shaping the future towards the better. Instead of looking into the biographies of single perpetrators, historical research should focus more on the construction of the legal and administrative framework which enabled and justified massive state killings during an extremely violent 20th Century. In the next article Arne Segelke, as organiser of the conference, writes on the interconnection between mass graves, violent events and history education, claiming that interdisciplinary research and exchange on mass graves should be fostered.

The three articles which follow focus on Georgia. In the first one, Bernd Bonwetsch and Marc Junge sum up their research project on the Stalinist “Great Purge” of 1937-1938 with a special focus on Georgia. The authors flavour the presentation of their results with a certain amount of shop talk, thus providing a unique insight into the debates and discussions surrounding the research project. The second article on Georgia was written by Irakli Khvadagiani, chief researcher of the Georgian NGO “SovLab” and gives a gripping account of SovLab’s quest to identify and exhume Soviet-era mass graves in Georgia. In the third article on Georgia, Matthias Klingenberg and Vanya Ivanova provide a rather personal insight into DVV International’s experiences with history projects in Georgia.

Experts from various countries participated in the conference and the subsequent four articles focus on Poland, Russia and Cambodia respectively. The archaeologist Justyna Sawicka describes in her article how historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, forensic doctors, and geneticists conjointly developed an interdisciplinary method to analyse mass graves. The author explains this method and its use by giving examples from various project sites and describes the support given by members of the project group to the SovLab in Georgia. Łukasz Szleszkowski, also a member of the project team, describes the work of IPN in Poland from the perspective of a forensic medical doctor. While Justyna Sawicka puts a special focus on the method of the project group, Łukasz Szleszkowski provides a broader view on the work of IPN. The article after that focusses on mass graves in Russia and is written by Mikhail Rojanskij, Director of the Centre for Independent Social Research and Education, an NGO in Irkutsk. To provide at least one view on the work with mass graves outside Europe, Russia and the Caucasus, the article which comes after deals with a project on sites of mass killings in Cambodia. The article is written by Long Khet, Director of Youth for Peace, a Cambodian NGO, and gives a detailed account of the NGO’s work at the local level.

The final two contributions examine visual representations of mass grave sites. Roma Sendyka, Director of the Research Centre for Memory Cultures at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, discusses the “haunting” quality of mass grave sites and advocates their inclusion into contemporary “social imageries”. The closing article is written by Ansgar Gilster, editor at the academic journal *Osteuropa*. He reflects on his photographic expeditions to both well-known and “forgotten” sites of the Holocaust and describes his physical and intellectual approach to these sites of large-scale murder.

Matthias Klingenberg
Arne Segelke



History, violence and mass graves

Construction by destruction – Ideological dimensions of collective violence in the 20th century

In his article, the author describes how the concept of violence has shifted from “disciplinary violence” towards “shaping violence” since the era of the European Enlightenment. During this shift, state violence in modern times – and especially during the 20th century – gained legitimacy through its incorporation in constructive frameworks. Massive state violence was justified by declaring it a necessary tool to shape the future towards the better by destroying past and present agents of faults and failures. Thus the collective violence, massacres, and genocides of the twentieth century destroyed precisely what they intended to destroy and were integrated into crucial social transformations. Research on massive violence is of major importance since disinterest and denial results in knowledge remaining in the hands of the perpetrators, while retreating to the position of a neutral observer has always resulted in allowing the perpetrators to act undisturbed – both while they annihilate and after.

“New conceptions require new terms. By ‘genocide’ we mean the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group. [...] This new word [...] is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves¹.”

This was the definition given in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish-Polish expert in international law, in response to a new type of political violence which had emerged at the start of the 20th century and would come to define that century’s history to the present day: The deliberate destruction of an ethnic group defined as an internal enemy, organised by the state and carried out according to a plan.

Experiences of genocide in the 20th century have made it impossible to discuss central aspects of society and identity in the modern age without taking into account the fact that violence and genocide are now integral processes of modern society. Some years ago, Thomas Macho said that the “Futurisierung des Guten²” [shaping the future of good] ought to be seen as one of the signatures of the modern age from which the right and the duty to shape the future may be derived.

It was Reinhart Koselleck who drew attention to the fact that we cannot discuss the challenge of shaping a society without considering the concept of malleability – the construction of a particular availability. Koselleck described the idea that one can make history as an experience specific to the modern era; that is to say, the experience of history as a history of humankind.

Historically, this idea belongs to secularisation and the Enlightenment. In this context, I would also like to refer briefly to Eisenstadt’s deliberations regarding self-constitution in the cultures of the Axial Age as well as Karl Löwith’s criticism of the philosophy of history. The fundamental disengagement of God from history is not the only thing that needs to be examined critically. I would also like to note that the demands associated with shaping society are never simply self-serving, but rather have aspects of renewal, salvation, and redemption at their core. Meister Eckhart wrote at the turn of the fourteenth century: “God does not see time, and no renewal occurs in His sight³.”

1/ Ralph Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1944, p. 79.

2/ Thomas Macho, „Künftige Generationen. Zur Futurisierung der Ethik in der Moderne“, in: Sigrid Weigel (ed.), *Generation: zur Genealogie des Konzepts, Konzepte von Genealogie*, München: Wilhelm Fink 2005, pp. 315–324, here p. 318.

3/ „Gott sieht nicht die Zeit, und in seinem Sehen geschieht auch keine Erneuerung.“ Translated from the German by Sylee Gore.

And so it is not wrong to forge a link between the concept of malleability and the idea of redemption: redemption was specifically thought of in Judaism in relation to their community and history, in which the covenant with God was regarded as a specific historical context. Not until the idea of redemption in Christianity and Islam was separated from the historically specific but also the historically uncertain; not until redemption becomes a fundamental and, in addition, a relatively secure promise, will it then also be possible for one to determine the course of history oneself. Where history becomes independent from experiences and memories, where past and future are even attributed to it, will epiphany and redemption be elevated to the status of concrete historical events.

Thus the institutionalisation of a universally valid time and the establishment of the concept of a linear-progressive world history can be regarded as the central act of standardising not only a Christian turning point, but also a post-biblical Islamic world. With this process of linearisation – and a denial of the dependence on fate of the history of the people of Israel – identity becomes malleable too. Identity is thus no longer merely defined as belonging, it can become a programme, it can be designed as modern, national, civilised or global. In other words, it is not the experience of free areas of action, as it would be described in modern sociology, which defines an “age of feasibility” (in the words of Odo Marquard)⁴; rather, action is empowered because the end of determination by fate has been defined.

If time and history are seen in absolute terms then it is generally no longer possible for other forms of time (such as eternity) to form part of life’s realm of experience. The universal linearisation marks the beginning of a modernity where history, education, development and culture cannot be shaped independently – in particular, history and the future can only be conceived of homogeneously. Hence, two developments emerge out of the process of becoming available as outlined by Reinhard Koselleck: one is the equation of world with history, politics with history, history with fate, history with future; and the second is the certainty that no competitors for the course of history exist or are allowed to exist – a conviction that is intended to legitimise the certainty that such competitors might be eliminated if necessary.

4/ "Wir leben im Zeitalter der Machbarkeit. Erst wurde nichts gemacht, dann wurde einiges gemacht, heute wird alles gemacht." (Marquard 1981: 67) Translated from the German original by Sylee Gore.

When today we speak about visions of the “malleability of society” with an eye to the 20th century, we cannot do so without thinking of those absolute and total visions of shaping societies and plans for new orders which had a lasting impact on that century: an exclusive nationalism, fascism and National Socialism, Stalinism, and Maoism. These are ideological systems which explicitly claim the right to fundamentally change history and society. “A will, as hard as steel, must today be joined to that illuminated mind and elevated spirit which Meister Eckehart demanded of his followers, and which is courageous enough to draw all proper conclusions from its avowal,^{5/}” wrote Alfred Rosenberg in his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. He went on to quote Eckhart on this point: “If you wish to have the kernel, then you must break the shell.”

In his essay “On the Concept of History,” Walter Benjamin^{6/} drew attention to the fact that the expressions “recognising the past” and “anticipating the future” mean taking possession of experiences and memories – and that the core of this empowerment is the idea of overcoming. Acts of overcoming which are built on talk of numbness or disappointment; ideas of shaping society, in which no consequences are taken into consideration, but in which the concentration applies solely to the moment of creation, namely the moment of overcoming.

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to make some short remarks about an important shift in the function of collective violence between the pre-modern period and modernity. And as said before, this shift is closely connected to the aspect of malleability.

In this regard, my argument is that in modernity – and becoming particularly intense at the beginning of the 20th century – collective violence has acquired a new quality and function, inherently distinguishing it from how violence was outlined in the pre-modern period. The term “Modernity” is used here as an epochal term, as a designation of a period which roughly started with the European Enlightenment and has not yet come to an end. The aforementioned paradigmatic change, the shift in quality and function of political violence in modernity, I want to conceive of as a transition from disciplinary to shaping violence.

5/ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-intellectual Confrontations of Our Age*, Torrance CA: Noontide Press 1982.

6/ Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2010.

What does it mean?

The difference between disciplinary violence and shaping violence lies both in their function as well as in the respective mechanisms of their legitimisation. This means that strategies of legitimisation of state violence during modernity differ from those of the pre-modern period. Indeed, it was with the Enlightenment that an incorporation of violence in new explanatory and reference frameworks became necessary, in order to legitimise the use of force at all. What this means is that henceforth the use of state violence required new strategies of explanation and justification. In fact, it is important to note that state violence in modernity – and especially during the 20th century – gains legitimacy as violence that serves to do something. Violence no longer gains legitimacy by being directed towards something but by shaping something. In this context the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault once coined this paradigmatic change with a focus on power as the transition from disciplinary power to biopower⁷.

What does this mean?

First of all, this means that in the pre-modern period power and violence gained legitimacy through their disciplining function; their function as punishment. By contrast, collective violence in modernity gains legitimacy through its incorporation in constructive/positive framings/frameworks. In modernity, state violence gains legitimacy through its incorporation in concepts focusing on the future, it gains legitimacy as a means of shaping a future. This may either be the future of a nation, an ethnic community or of a classless society. Of course one could add different future-oriented concepts – and not only those represented in the Western world. This is something we may be currently experiencing in the Middle East.

Shaping the future! – this is possibly the legitimising framework of state violence in modernity. Intervention in history, overcoming and the creation of a new order – this is one of the central themes that helped regimes such as those of the Nazis or the Young Turks become capable of attaining consensus. Therefore, when I speak of “genocidal intent” in the following, I assume that genocide is based both consciously and unconsciously on traditional and updated positions in the decision-making

^{7/} Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I: The Will to Knowledge* [1976], London: Penguin 1980.

process. Even if the implementation of collective persecution and violence definitely exhibits structurally determined, specific self-escalating processes, they are not the central characteristic of genocide.

The question of the “intention” of the perpetrator will today be answered mainly with deliberations on specific patterns of behaviour or the hierarchy of escalation. It will however deal less with the question of aspects of planning and their ideological frameworks. Previous explanatory constructions have presented possible motives for genocide: social, psychological, or economic. Is it too hard to accept that destruction itself could be the intention and the goal? In the analysis of genocide, it is possible that we cannot trace a single motive, a dominant motive, or even a constellation of motives. But we have to confront the indisputable results of previous genocides: the successful homogenisation of social structures.

The collective violence, massacres, and genocides of the 20th century destroyed precisely that which they intended to destroy. They were integrated into central social transformations. The modern state did not only accompany the modernising processes of achieving national societies, it also determined those processes. It should be permissible to speak of the “intention” and “programme” of a specific instance of destruction, if one can view it as being based on a process of development and a structure of actors and institutions, in the light of an increasingly intense escalation of destructive acts.

One of the key points to bear in mind is that genocides are processes that affect the whole of society. In each of the two potentially most radical genocides in the history of Europe, namely the murder of the Western Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire by the Young Turks in 1915-16 and the murder of European Jews by the Nazis – which left only 15,000 Jewish people alive in Germany in 1945, to give another perspective on the number of people killed – a whole society, with all its institutions and structures, in everyday life and exceptional situations, including its educational and economic systems, culture and religion was woven into the process.

To speak of genocidal intent, therefore, is most importantly not to presuppose inevitable or even cyclical historical processes, and generally not to succumb to the search for a single explanatory model: be it the model of totalitarianism, the leader clique or models such as that of a relapse into the civilisational darkness of world history. For genocide, there was and is an option. The violence of the genocide process, the modern, institutionally-supported violence of the 20th century, is reflected in this interweaving of political, social, ideological, and cultural institutions, structures, and variables. Genocide cannot be explained by means of closed groups of perpetrators, but only via the analysis of perpetrator societies – and the

concepts and visions that they hold regarding the national identity that is to be created.

Violence and identity

The challenge violence poses in particular questions regarding individual and collective constructions of identity can be explained not least by the character of the modern extreme violence of persecution, war and genocide. For it is not only the hierarchical structures of an impenetrable, integrated command structure which connect individual murderous perpetrators with the individual administrators. The exercising and legitimisation of violence exhibit very close links to the identity-related constructions of the perpetrator society. The investigative question of genocide and identity therefore has two perspectives that must be taken into particular account: for the victims, living through genocide represents a variety of successive disruptions, injuries and losses. Experiencing extreme physical and psychological injuries does not only have long-lasting traumatic effects which are transferred to subsequent generations, but also results in the most radical destruction of all identity-building positions.

The destruction of the victim's identity is not, however, a side-effect of the violence carried out: it is its goal right from the start. Racial, ideological stigmatisation, repressive measures that affect the religious, cultural, and educational life of the community – in genocide, these elements are aimed at the destruction of the entire basis for identification from the start. The policy of genocide is aimed at destruction as a whole, a destruction that goes beyond the bodies of the dead, the destruction not only of the physical presence, but, in addition, of the future and past presence.

This leads to the second perspective that must be considered under the question of genocide and identity: because plans for annihilation are weighed up as a means of making possible the shaping of an identity, an identity in the society of perpetrators.

The act of deactivation, the elimination of a specific group from society, is intended to strengthen and to make uniform; it is intended to support the *Arbeit am Volkskörper* [work on the body of the population], the future of the perpetrators' identity.

Identity and exclusion

Briefly – very briefly – I would like to concretise these thoughts by means of an example. I will do so using the concept of identity of the Young

Turks, which is not as well-known as the basic ideological parameters of the National Socialists. In 1911, Ziya Gökalp, probably the most important theoretician and ideologist of the Young Turks movement, wrote in his famous poem Turan: “For the Turks, Fatherland means neither Turkey, nor Turkestan; Fatherland is a large and eternal country – Turan^{8/}!” At the time, the Young Turks had already seized power and had control of parliament. They emerged as a reform movement within the modernising developments of the Ottoman Empire, working towards the goal of a *terakkıyat-ı cedide*, a “new progress.” This modernising process of reform was replaced at the end of the 19th century by the visions of a *yeni hayat*, a “new life” as a “new order” which was subjugated to the realisation of a *milli hayat*: the “national life.” The dream of the Young Turks was the political realisation of a union of all Turks, the much-vaunted *tevhid-i etrâk*, under a territorial (yet also culturally and in particularly linguistically legitimised vision of space): Turan.

The term Turan refers first and foremost to a change in orientation: a turning away from elements of Arabic and Persian culture and history and a turning towards the Turkish nation and towards a territorial north-east orientation; to wit, to the Turkic peoples of the Russian empire. The territorial vision of Turan therefore describes a large national-imperial space encompassing all Turkic-speaking peoples. Whereas the territorial borders of Turan between southeastern Europe and Central Asia tended to remain undefined, its political and social borders were all the more clear. And within these political and social borders there was no space for the Other, the non-Turk – in particular, the Armenian.

In his key piece *The Principles of Turkism*, Ziya Gökalp wrote in 1913: “The long-range ideal of Turkism is Turan [...] it is a social term which embraces Turks only.[...] Turan is the great fatherland of all Turks, which was reality in the past and may be so again in the future. Turanians [*turanlılar*; editor’s note] are only the Turkic-speaking nations^{9/}.” This vision was bound up with a concept of an order and a body of people, which could be created through an intervention aimed at shaping society. One would be hard-pressed to find a clearer formulation of creating a people than this passage from a didactic poem written in 1913, “Kızıl elma” (red apple – a symbol of the Turan Empire) by Ziya Gökalp: “The people is like a garden, /

^{8/} Quoted from Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press 1995, pp. 37.

^{9/} Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism*, translated from the Turkish and annotated by Robert Devereux, Leiden: Brill 1968, p. 19f.

we are supposed to be its gardeners! / First the bad shoots are to be cut / and then the scion is to be grafted¹⁰.”

Gökalp has the central female figure of this epic speak this verse, the “noble” Turkish girl Ay Hanum, who is to be the mother of the new generations. Creating new generations as a conscious and creative act intended to enable a new, different generation to grow up – that is the central goal of genocide politics. The aspect of the generational incidentally also plays a central role in the context of self-empowerment to radical acts vis-à-vis the main practitioners of genocidal politics. The idea of being a generation – and therefore not just a political grouping, not just a specific movement – must be regarded as an important formative element. The definition as a generation allows common experience to dictate commonality, independent of actual years of birth. Nevertheless, this also lays the groundwork, alongside continuity, for the demand for ruptures – ruptures which are intended to signal a fundamental change in political and social relationships in order to realise a future conceived of as ideal which had been thus promised in the past.

It is about a rupture in history, a rupture that is intended to bring together expectation and promises. The self-conceptualisation as a generation acting historically which authorises itself to realise a future promised in the past by means of a radical breach, and thus fulfil a historical duty, at once defines a moment of truth, a moment of proving oneself. Every generation which authorises itself through such a violent conflation of promise and fulfilment to annihilate a “present” in order to shape a “future,” I call a decisive generation.

The definition of a target group for genocide is certainly encouraged by predominantly held stereotypes and prejudices or also by a prior history of persecution. Yet the atmosphere of annihilation is particularly characterised by the feeling of fulfilling a national duty, one which might also be experienced as a burdensome obligation: The fulfilment of an important, honourable duty, acting for a new beginning, a breakthrough into modernity, under the impression of a danger, a threat posed to the body of one’s own people. “We will not capitulate, ever. We may go down. But we will

¹⁰/ Quoted from Mihran Dabag, “Modern Societies and Collective Violence: the Framework of Interdisciplinary Genocide Studies”, in: Graham Charles Kinloch and Raj P. Mohan (ed.), *Genocide: Approaches, Case Studies, and Responses*, New York NY: Algora Publishing 2005, pp. 37-62, here p. 50.

take a world with us¹¹.” Hans Blumenberg recorded this statement by Adolf Hitler in order to show his attempt at uniting a lifespan and world time in the realisation of a delusional plan. By deactivating all traditional morals, the question of annihilation itself becomes a moral question. The perpetrator does not become a beast, a callous monster. He overcomes his moral conflict through the knowledge that he is performing an important and necessary act. The perpetrator is motivated less by hate, contempt, or racism than by a resolve treated as a normative claim of validity which is not imposed by acts of terror but which is equally felt by the perpetrators making the plans and by “ordinary” citizens. A plan for genocide seeks to realise an inner order, to shape a new and strong identity. Genocide is not a way of solving a conflict, but rather a realisation of something “higher”, something “holy”, the creation of a new present. Genocide is a means of violently realising a vision of an exclusive national (or, as today in the case of IS, religiously defined) community of like-minded people in the shortest space of time.

In closing, I would like to pose the (perhaps naive) question: What lessons may be learned from the genocides of the 20th century? Let me focus on two aspects: First: Denial results in knowledge remaining in the hands of the perpetrators. Second: Observing is deadly. The bitter truth is that, historically speaking, retreating to the position of a neutral observer has always resulted in allowing the perpetrators to act undisturbed – both while they annihilate – and also after.

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^{11/} „Wir kapitulieren nicht, niemals. Wir können untergehen. Aber wir werden eine Welt mitnehmen.“ Originally quoted from Nicolaus von Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant 1937–1945*, Mainz: Hase und Koehler 1980, p. 398; here quoted by Hans Blumenberg, *Lebenszeit und Weltzeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp: 1986, p. 80.

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Mass graves, violent events and history education

The article focuses on the connection between mass graves, violent events and history education. Until the First World War, history writing usually focussed on the deeds of “great men” and victorious battles. The sites of such battles were often transformed into historical sites with the intention to authenticate nationalist historical narratives. After the end of the First World War, aspects of loss, sacrifice and mourning became a more important part in the transformation of war-related mass graves into historical sites. During the 1930s and 1940s, totalitarian regimes (such as in Germany and the USSR) created historical sites designed to connect the ideas of national pride, greatness and sacrifice. In the western part of Germany, the authority of “official” historical narratives and sites were questioned during the 1980s. Under the claim “dig where you stand”, a younger generation of historians and citizens fostered independent local research on history and the identification of “alternative” historical sites. Most historical projects supported by DVV International are rooted in this approach, as for example projects on mass graves conducted by initiatives and NGOs in various countries.

Violent events and history

Events of historical relevance create, in many cases, violent acts. Battles and wars, revolutions and purges, conquests and crusades, conflicts and treaties – such events structure written history and are major topics in history education. Moreover, violent events structure the development of individual and collective memory and assist in synchronising history and memory. Though many people might be a bit unsure about what happened in the histories of their countries and families in the 1920s or 1930s, for example, they usually do know about the history of the Second World War and its impact on the history of their family.

Sites as silent witnesses of history

Violent events are connected to specific sites. Some of these sites have been turned into places of remembrance. Visiting them forms a regular part of history education. Though such sites have witnessed historical events and offer the possibility to engage with history on the spot, they remain silent. Special knowledge is needed to communicate with them and decipher their relation to history. Not least, since the interconnection between sites and history is a complex one. Sites can be used to create, to authenticate or to question a historical narrative.

Making sites speak: Different approaches to historical sites

Archaeologists, for example, use sites to create a historical narrative. The knowledge gained by analysing various sites and comparing the results enables them to create a story about the past. Ethnologists, on the other hand, have a different approach to sites. Instead of digging up the ground and looking for remains of the past, they focus on the interaction between sites and living human beings. From an ethnologist's point of view, certain sites are of special importance to a community. Rituals performed at such sites help to structure social interaction between members of the community and stabilise the community over the years. Unlike archaeologists and ethnologists, historians rely on texts as their primary source of knowledge. By interpreting and comparing archive material, historians create a narrative about the past which can be linked to certain sites of history.

19th century “history boom” and the creation of historical sites

The formation of modern nation-states in Europe during the 19th century was accompanied by a “history boom”. Artists and writers embraced historical topics; historical societies and museums were founded and history became part of school curricula while (historical) monuments were set up in each town. History was not just a hobby-horse of the emerging middle-class, it was a matter of state politics, since historical master narratives helped to justify claims for power and over territory. State authorities became masters of history, controlling historical education as well as the creation of historical sites. Such sites were never neutral, since they had been selected and prepared for a purpose. While history can be described as a narrative that makes sense of the past, a historical site can be described as a place that has been defined and shaped according to its relation with history. Most of the historical sites created during the 19th century were designed to authenticate history.

Changing approaches to history and historical sites during the 20th century

During the course of the 20th century, both the selection and the preparation of historical sites changed. At the beginning of the century, historical sites usually marked places of victorious battles fought by great nations and empires under the leadership of great men on their rise to even greater power and glory. The apparent senselessness and the heavy losses of World War I changed things. Commemoration of the Great War focussed less on victory or defeat, but rather on loss and sacrifice. Mass graves – styled and presented as war cemeteries – formed some of the most relevant historical sites related to the war. Yet like the monuments erected before 1914, they still referred to master narratives about the heroic struggle of states and empires. During the 1930s and 1940s, totalitarian regimes created historical sites designed to connect the ideas of national pride, greatness and sacrifice. Adopting eschatological ideologies, regimes in Germany and the USSR (as well as in some other European countries) struggled for a total control over past, present and future. Total control over history meant total control over historical sites as well. Historical sites in accordance with the official historical narrative were prepared according to the aesthetic ideal of heroic monumentalism while careful attention was given to avoid the creation of sites which might threaten the claim for total control over history. This referred particularly to sites of mass killings and mass burials. Both the German and the Soviet-Russian regime made a

point of not only killing their victims but in destroying their corpses as well. Millions fell victim to the German reign of terror between 1933 and 1945 and their remains were burned and/or dumped into mass graves all over Europe. In the USSR, orders were given to hide the mass burials resulting from the “Great Terror” of 1937/1938 as much as possible.

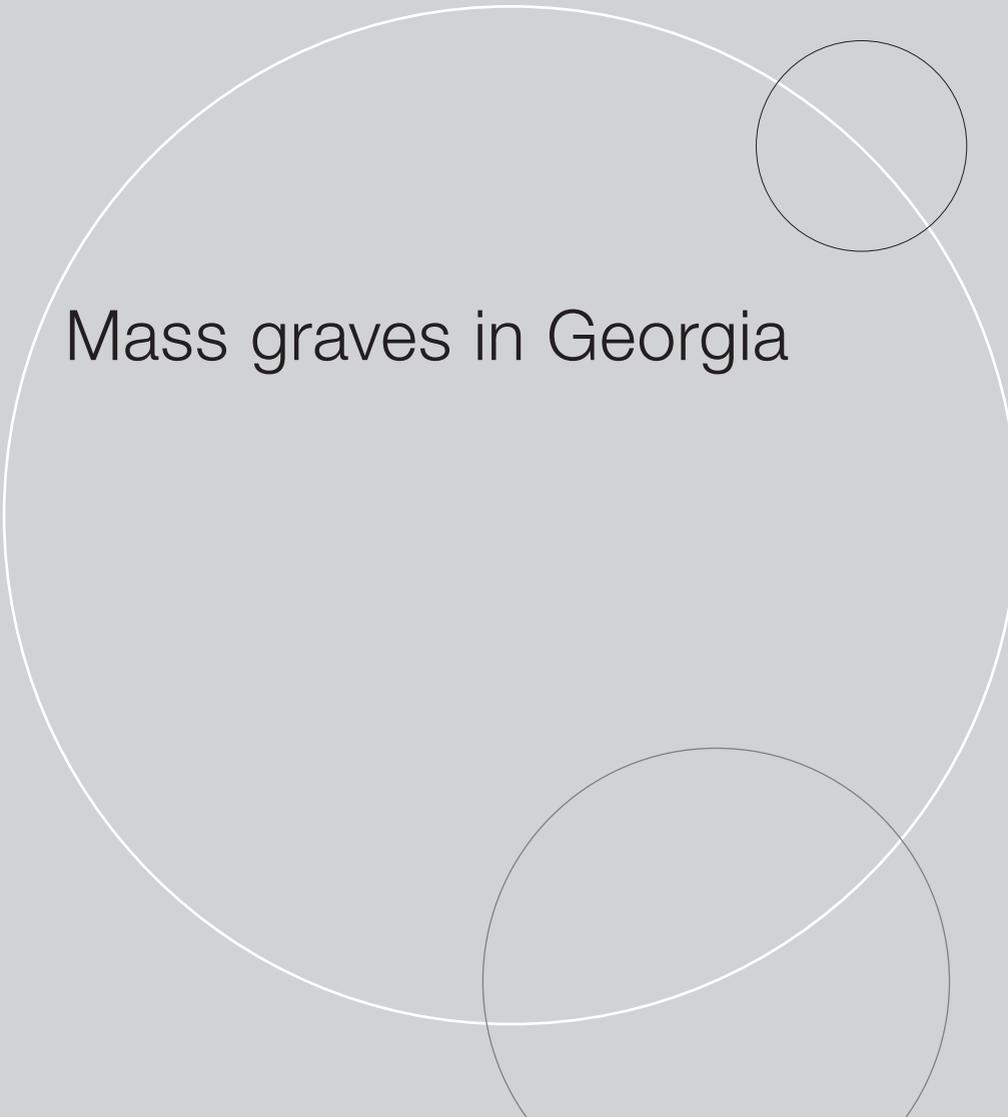
After the end of the war, Germans lost their appetite for history a bit. Instead of facing the terror they had waged across Europe and taking responsibility for the millions of deaths, Germans preferred to look away from their history, focussing on reconstruction and economic issues instead. In the western part of Germany, a consensus of silence on the years of 1933-45 was established. It lasted until the 1980s, when a younger generation started to challenge it. New approaches to history – for example like micro-history, local history or oral history – enabled younger historians to ask new questions about history. Under the motto “dig where you stand” these historians joined the emerging civic movement with the intention of taking history from academic and communal dignitaries in order to hand it to the people. The goal was to establish a history of everyday life, a “history from below” challenging the predominant historical narrative which focussed on the fate of nation states. Even the silenced years 1933 to 1945 came under scrutiny. And, as it turned out, these years had been silenced for a reason. Traces of the system of abuse and destruction established during 1933-45 could be found at almost every street corner and many of the perpetrators still held senior positions in politics, administration and the economy. To break up the consensus of silence, victims of the former regime were asked to talk with school classes about their experiences. Places of forced labour, imprisonment, repression and death were prepared as historical sites by members of the various history workshops, school projects and NGOs with the goal to challenge the consensus of silence. This civic and critical approach to history gained more and more popularity over the years among history educators in Germany and now forms the standard in history education. The history projects of DVV International, for example, are rooted in this tradition of empowering individuals to critically question historical narratives and do independent work with history.

In the USSR and Eastern Europe, things went differently. There was no change of system after 1945, and the mass killings which had happened during the early Soviet and Stalin era remained taboo and were relegated to silence. This changed when the USSR collapsed in 1989. Civic activists joined together and set out to investigate the silenced parts of history. Organisations like *Memorial* managed to trace and examine mass graves resulting from the Great Purge of 1937/38. The existence of these

sites challenged the official Soviet narrative on history – which was exactly the reason why they had been hidden so well.

By now, in most European and post-communist countries, research on mass graves dating back to the 1930s and 1940s has been carried out. Still, no traces of mass graves from this period have been found in Georgia so far. Such a lack of knowledge not only denies the survivors a place to mourn, it results in a lack of evidence as well. Until at least one grave has been found and examined, no real hard fact proof of the killings exists.

Over the last few years, DVV International has supported projects dealing with the Soviet past, including research on mass graves. Part of this support was a conference entitled *20th Century Mass Graves: Witnesses of Violence – Sources of History* which was carried out in cooperation with Ruhr Universität Bochum and the support of Volkswagen**Stiftung** in Tbilisi in October 2015.



Mass graves in Georgia

Georgia on its way – record of a research project

The research project on mass repressions 1937-38 in Georgia resulted in three major findings: It established the total figure of victims in Georgia – about 25,000 – more than half of whom were shot and put into mass graves. Different from the rest of the USSR, in Georgia not only ordinary people but also members of party and state elites were sentenced by the local, non-judicial organ, the kulak troika which acted under considerable Georgian Communist Party influence. Elite members were “normally” put on trial before the Military Division of the Supreme Court in Moscow. The purges in Georgia had no ethnic “cleansing” intentions but had a considerable bias towards ethnic homogenisation in favour of the Georgian ethnicity. This last finding has provoked serious ongoing discussions between Georgian and German historians.

The hunt for, the marking and the maintenance of mass graves from the civil war and Soviet period in Georgia forms part of the subsequent and not always easy search and acknowledgement, yes, the “discovery” of mass graves as places of remembrance in all of the former Soviet Union.

The first example was the discovery of the mass graves in Katyn in 1943, which for decades made the Germans officially responsible. Somewhat different was the case with the now infamous Piskarev Cemetery in Leningrad, where tens of thousands of victims of the German starvation blockade were buried in mass graves. Therefore, use of the term “funeral” for what happened at that time is a completely misleading euphemism. But the special importance of the Leningrad cemetery is that it was the beginning of a whole rather timid “mass grave culture”, as seen in Berlin with the establishment of the Soviet War Memorial (Treptower Park) for the Soviet soldiers who fell in the Battle of Berlin. After all, some 7,000 of the countless fallen Red Army soldiers are buried there. At battlegrounds such as Stalingrad and Volgograd this mass grave culture continued.

It was completely different as regards the mass graves for the victims of Stalinism. Rethinking about this only began with *Perestroika*. It was the Memorial Society which had as its particular goal the search for such mass graves and their acknowledgement as places of remembrance. The so-called Butovo Firing Range on the southern edge of Moscow was a place that was relatively unobtrusive and declared a *Special Object* for the NKVD, where they could carry out death sentences by gunshot execution. Between 1937 and 1938 alone, 20,000 “enemies of the people” were shot and buried in mass graves here. Thanks to the efforts the Memorial Society and also of the Russian Orthodox Church, the firing range has become a kind of commemoration and place of remembrance, which was even visited by President Putin in 2007. Of course, such remembrance and memorial sites are still not commonplace, however, it requires courage and tenacity to strive for their establishment. Without pressure from Poland, the Katyn memorial would scarcely have been established.

In the former Soviet republics, which have to a large extent become accustomed to regarding communism, and with it the Stalinist terror, as a purely “Russian affair”, there was therefore a strong tendency to downplay their own part in the terror directed by the state. This also applies to Georgia – whereas added to that is the personified essence of Stalinism, namely Stalin himself, who was a Georgian and is still considered, in broad circles, a major figure in Georgian history. In Gori, Stalin’s birthplace, clearly visible Stalin worship is not yet history.

The search for mass graves, also as places of remembrance, has nevertheless begun here. It will be reported on by others in the present volume. Our research project had as a condition the need to discover

mass graves in Georgia, namely through the study of the mass purges of 1937-38 in this Caucasus republic. The authors involved have “qualified” themselves for such an investigation in that they have participated, in the past, in the exploration of the total phenomenon of Soviet “massive operations” and the Great Purge, with a special emphasis on the events in Ukraine. Concerned here was the largest action of the secret service, the campaign of persecution against “kulaks, criminals and other counter-revolutionary elements”, referred to as the *Kulak Operation* in Cheka (ЧК) jargon. It forms a central string of events of what in Soviet history is called the Great Terror, but remained hidden from the rest of the world, which was under the spell of the great Moscow show trials, until the secret archives were opened in 1991. In the 20th century, which is rich in monstrous crimes by the state, there is probably no other purge of this magnitude for which there is so much documentary evidence – also documents of a special quality, because they implicate the highest organ of power of the regime, the Politburo, and the de facto highest representatives of party and state, I. V. Stalin and V. M. Molotov, as the authors and initiators of mass murder and the instructions for the imprisonment not only of the elite, but in particular the common Soviet population. Preparation and implementation were controlled from start to finish by a legion of circulars, memoranda, directives and interpretations by the Politburo or the intelligence headquarters.

This experience was now to be checked and expanded in reference to the particular circumstances in Georgia. In this sense, under our direction and with the support of the Volkswagen Foundation from 2010-2015, two part-projects were carried out at the German Historical Institute in Moscow and then at the Historical Institute of the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in cooperation with Dali Kandelaki, the Director of the Centre for Study of the History of Russia and Russian-Georgian relations at the Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, in the Republic of Georgia. The first project was entitled: “The Stalinist mass exterminations in Georgia from 1937 to 1938. A perspective from the Caucasian periphery”, the second was called “Beggars, the asocial, prostitutes, criminals. The Great Purge of the small enemies of the socialist society in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) by the militia troikas, 1934-1938.”

The scientific results of the two projects were documented in various publications. The first of these is the German-language publication available as Volume 5 in the scientific series of the German Historical Institute in Moscow (Junge & Bonwetsch 2015). At the same time, a Russian edition was published, which is considerably larger compared to the German edition. It has a separate document volume, plus the internal Georgian and international discussion about the research results was published in its

complete form (Юнре & Бонвеч 2015). In addition, a complete Georgian edition has been published. It is identical in content to the Russian, but had to be published in three parts (for the reasons see below.): Part 1 of the project results under the title “Bolshevik order in Georgia” (in two volumes) and Part 2, entitled “Ethnos and Terror” (იუნგე & თუმურაშვილი & ბონვეჩი 2015; იუნგე & ბონვეჩი & მიულერი 2015).

In the proceedings of an international conference about ethnic persecutions, an excerpt from the research of the project, namely the ethnic connotation of persecution in the Great Terror 1937-1938, has been published (Young & Muller 2016). For the English-speaking world, the project results were included within a larger context, namely the mass liquidations during Stalinism and the corresponding historiographical controversies involved (Young 2016).

Scientific results

For the first time in the historiography of the Great Terror, through the example of Georgia, all three massive operations could be examined together: Purges according to Order No. 00447 against “kulaks, criminals and other counterrevolutionary elements”, the purges under *National Operations* and finally the elimination of social deviates (e.g. beggars, prostitutes, criminals and hooligans) by the militia troika.

At the centre of the research the specifics of mass persecution in Georgia were contrasted with the whole Soviet Union. It consisted in the fact that the power of elimination was delegated from the Moscow centre to the periphery. Its special expression in Georgia was found in the fact that in this Caucasian republic, through the extra-judicial bodies of the mass operations, it was mostly the elites who were sentenced, although really just the common people should have been tried. Due to this special instance it was necessary in Georgia to also consider the purges of people on the so-called *Stalin lists*, and the constitutionally protected Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR – a court for the sentencing of elites – and compare them to the three massive operations. A striking similarity between the extra-judicial bodies and the legal Military Collegium in the “discovery of enemies and the sentencing process” was thereby determined.

In addition, during the investigation the question arose of whether the Great Terror also had an ethnic dimension, or even racist and genocidal aspects in this multiethnic Caucasian republic: It became clear, finally, that the political, social and economic “land consolidation order” was *also* used in order to continue to pursue national titular homogenisation, which

had been in operation in Georgia since the twenties. This is shown in the central section of our project publication “Ethnos and Terror.” This points to a further special characteristic of Georgia in the Great Terror. This titular homogenisation was astutely combined with a suppression of the influence of other ethnic groups in favour of ethnic Georgians. The central government of Georgia could by no means significantly expand their power on their own but could, with the resources of the targeted priorities of the purges, exert their influence on the territories and institutions of their republic, to which there had been no full access available previously. One only needs to think of the original special status of Abkhazia, which since the 1920s has almost non-stop and constantly had its rights restricted compared with other areas of its kind, an autonomous region with special rights, like an ordinary Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in the Soviet Union.

If in some regions of Georgia ethnic-national components played a key role, even because of the policy of consolidation of power by the Tbilisi centre, the specific study of the relationship between “Ethnos and Terror” has also shown that locally there was only a sparsely applied ethnic component in the definition of “enemy,” and on the other hand no genocidal or racist aspects at all. We traced the emergence of this discussion to the one-sided influence of the ideas of National Socialism and weak empirical studies of the mass exterminations (Baberowski 2012: 345, 352; Weitz 2002: 6; Hirsch 2002: 44-53; Leimon 2002: 54-61; Weiner 2002: 44-53; Weitz 2002a: 62-65; Weitz 2003: 84). Such a policy, would in our view, only be able to be realised with the help of state structures and a corresponding ideology.

A fundamental result of the projects – which is not only valid for Georgia – was that, in the carrying out of the purges, the possibility of incorporating their own interests further strengthened the cooperation between the centre and the periphery and lent additional momentum to this practice. In this respect, the allegation which was made in intra-Georgian discussions, that the republic had suffered exceptionally under the mass liquidation orders coming from Moscow in comparison to other republics, regions and territories of the Soviet Union, is a claim that does not bring mitigation. The then leadership of Georgia had, as it were, not initiated the purges, but their own contribution towards their implementation cannot be forgotten. On the contrary, the contextualisation of the purges, through looking at the repressions in other regions of the Soviet Union, underlined once again that the Party and State elite, especially in Georgia, understood exactly the leeway given to them and used it to the maximum for their own purposes. Therefore, the purge numbers and the degree of repression with respect to the prevailing conditions in this Caucasus

republic were high, however – and the comparison also revealed this – not abnormally high. Even in the other regions of the Soviet Union the various specific conditions could have devastating effects.

The particularly well-functioning cooperation between Tbilisi and Moscow led additionally to the interests of Moscow, such as the final securing of collectivisation, border security, the streamlining of national policy in terms of promoting the titular nations, and to some extent also the elimination of a potential “fifth column” (danger of war), being built in and pursued without any major friction with the practice of the local purges and thus gave them further momentum.

A fundamental problem in the discussion about the liquidation policy of the Soviet Union is that the motives of the punitive policy must be derived from the perspective of their results. There are practically no data and documents with which the party and government and the punitive organs legitimise their policy, give reasons for their actions or explain them.

Relation to the present

What must be particularly noted is that the projects had, and have, a strong political recollection reference to the present. In the young independent nation of Georgia, there is an enhanced need to discuss the importance of history for the current nation-building process, including the question of how to deal with the historical events which are perceived as “negative”. The project team sought to promote a pluralistic argument when dealing with historical events. This was not always easy. Georgia is in a process in which nationalist forces are “wrestling” with liberals looking toward Europe.

For the concrete work undertaken, this situation had a significant impact. The project team worked closely with the Archives of the Interior Ministry of Georgia, where the most important materials and documents are kept. The archive initially proved to be very cooperative. It opened up and evaluated the massive sources in close collaboration with the project team. There was completely free access to the materials, and the archive even independently provided new documents. The archive materials found turned out to be extremely complex, so that the project team even had to be expanded with additional specialists. This measure mainly affected only the accidentally discovered possibility to illuminate the ethnic dimension of the Great Terror. Brought in here were, in Germany, Daniel Müller, specialist in nation-building in the Caucasus, and W. Feurstein, a specialist on the Lazen ethnic group, included as a consultant in Russia was I. Dzhucha, who is very familiar with the Greeks as a diaspora nationality. In addition, they also possessed vital contacts with other researchers. All three scientists are now

present as authors in the project publication. Overall, optimal competence was thus able to be integrated in the project for the sensitive topic “Ethnos and Terror”. This also turned out to be extremely necessary. Because prior to the publication of the project results, there was an unexpectedly violent reaction by Georgian historians to the first version of the written research results on the ethnic dimension of the Great Terror. This debate also significantly cooled the relationship between the Archives of the Interior Ministry and the project team. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that the archive, even in this situation, commendably did much to resolve the conflict.

Ultimately, however, a consensus between the project management and the archive has not been able to be reached, since the research results, after a joint review, confirmed that which, due to national sensitivity, was not acceptable to the archive and the Georgian historians.

The project management has finally decided not to withhold the project results from the scientific community, thus publishing what also transpired. Therefore, for the sake of fairness and with the intention of stimulating a broad discussion, the entire criticism from the Georgian side was added to the publication.

We should also mention that the whole project was accompanied from the outset by the Caucasus specialist Oliver Reisner. He was not only involved as a “conflict manager” but also as a co-author of the introduction. The extensive historiographical part of the introduction could not have been written without him.

Self-critically, it may be noted that it only became fully clear to the project team during the course of the work what emotional significance historical research has in the emergent nations of the disintegrated Soviet Union. Through the discussion in advance of publication, which was in part conducted with very tough talk, we were forced to define and explain what kind of understanding we have of science. In the end we – albeit with some effort and self-awareness – understood that even a pluralistic approach would be considered as *non plus ultra* authoritarian. However, we have successfully stood fast for an open discussion in which everyone can present their position without censorship being exerted.

Knowledge gained specifically by the German part of the project team was that it played a not unimportant role in Georgia, and that the unpleasant findings by historians who arrived from Germany, with its Nazi past, presumed to make judgments that, according to some Georgian historians, were not theirs to make.

Ultimately, it was always the question of the level of interpretation or the admission of plurality of opinion. The working team, despite all the problems, benefited from the debate and respects the commitment of everyone involved.

New generation

In carrying out the research project, it has been possible to involve young Georgian scientists in the work. Three of them (G. Kldiashvili, L. Avalishvili, D. Dzhishkariani) participated directly in the publications, or can show written results. All three scientists participated in conferences, discussions and the work in the archives. Here, next to concrete questions that had to do directly with the topic, methodological approaches were also discussed and tried out in practice. In addition, the written texts were mutually reviewed. Some chapters were also written under joint authorship (Junge-Kldiashvili).

In the discussion about the controversial project results two more young Georgian scientists (I. Dzhikia, I. Chvadagiani) were involved in addition to the young scientists already mentioned. Their comments are printed in the discussion part of the publication. The published project results are now the basis for student seminars in Georgia at the College of Journalism in Tbilisi (Tiko Tsomia). Ethics of Science and History are the central issue here. An extremely useful aspect of the research project proved to be that the results are also available in the Georgian language.

In retrospect, it was proven useful to work less with older Georgian historians socialised in the Soviet Union and rather much more with the younger generation. Thus the harshest critics of the project results were, with one exception (I. Dzhikia), only established historians, sometimes even members of the Academy of Sciences of Georgia, who insisted on sovereignty of interpretation with respect to Georgian history and still continue to so insist. The communist past of the country seems to be a problem for them only if they can interpret it as Russian.

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About the absence of the present: Mass graves of the Stalin era in Georgia

The article explains the background of DVV International's support for various historical projects in Georgia, with a special focus on a project aiming at identifying and examining Soviet era mass graves. Though mass graves dating back to the Soviet era have been identified in most post-communist countries by now, this is not the case in Georgia, where the topic is considered to be a difficult one. The authors explain the reasons for this particular Georgian view, as for example the lack of a fact-based, post-Soviet historical narrative about Georgian history or the silencing of difficult aspects of history. The authors argue that open and critical public debates about all aspects of history, together with civic engagement, are essential for the establishment of an open, democratic society.

^{1/} Article written by Matthias Klingenberg, responsible for the frames: Vanya Ivanova

“And now this is what we have to say: as a matter of fact, not only behind Nikolay Ivanovich’s back, nor merely in front and all around him, but also even inside Nikolay Ivanovich here was nothing, nothing existed.”

Daniil Kharms: *On phenomena and existences No. 2* (1934)

Prologue

The mass graves of the Soviet period are not a real issue in today’s Georgia. This country is ahistorical; historical references are only created where they can allegedly support a straight contemporary narrative. That means history is a means to an end. But what purpose should the scientific analysis of Soviet era mass graves have? Even as a political instrument for the defamation of a person one opposes or of a faction, this history is inappropriate because the roles of perpetrators and victims are too close to each other and it would be much too dangerous to open that Pandora’s Box.

Georgia is a small country. Tbilisi, the capital, is a small city, and in principle, probably for centuries, the same families and groups have been determining life here. Elite continuity would be the adequate term. The open-



Possible mass grave site Soghanlugi, near Tbilisi, Georgia

Source: Matthias Klingenberg

Overlapping perpetrator and victim roles

In some conflicts the guilt question is clearly answered and one challenging that narrative will have severe problems in finding support for his/her interpretation. The Holocaust, for example, killed millions of Jews and people with a Jewish family background. The perpetrators were mostly henchmen of the German National Socialist regime ruling at that time. This is clearly comparable with many other conflicts, wars and genocides. But in some contexts the roles of perpetrators and victims are not so easily kept apart. In Cambodia for example, the Khmer Rouge regime killed hundreds of thousands of people, but many of the victims were also perpetrators, the regime coercively “re-educated” these people and they became killers themselves, and then, only a short time later, the same regime executed these people as well. A comparable situation occurred in the 1930s in the Soviet Union, where purges of the party and the apparatus also victimised perpetrators who were extremely guilty. Among other problems, with these kinds of past conflicts it is an immense challenge to establish a functioning culture of remembrance for these atrocities and their victims. But working in such contexts also enables you to work with perpetrators, an approach neglected for far too long in the processes of past projects.

ing of the mass graves in and around Tbilisi could raise questions which are difficult to answer. It could overturn narratives that are meaningful for today’s Georgia. For instance, it could disenchant or even disprove the myth of the ancient cultural nation Georgia, which became a victim of the aggressive Russian-Soviet imperialism. Too many ethnic Georgians were directly, knowingly and wilfully involved in the executions. Yes, they temporarily even gave them a special manifestation and direction. It could come to light that the Georgians were an ethnic group in the Soviet Union, which took part in many decisions, and that Georgians were the ones who often actively shaped the politics of the USSR. This recognition could have lasting consequences for the self-image of the citizens of today’s Georgia. For Georgians were not only victims but also perpetrators – and this not only in relation to their own little republic but also in the Soviet dimension. The blood-soaked stories of the two Georgians, Stalin and Beria, could therefore produce volumes of cautionary tales.

The government of Mikheil Saakashvili wanted to build its new modern Georgia on the basis of a simple logic: liberation from the Soviet past and the connection to the great history of the country before the occupation by Soviet Russia. Of course a figure like Stalin interfered with this context. It is therefore no surprise that the work on Stalin remained mostly unfinished and that the affiliation to the West and the proclamation of so-called European values as a point of reference ceased

at the latest when it came up against the idea of a critical analysis of the past. The Stalin museum, located in the Georgian village of Gori, has in

all seriousness only managed to speak about the victims of Stalinism in a dark hole underneath the stairs ... in this case it would have been even more decent to omit this topic completely.

Observing Georgian society, the whole dilemma can be shown on the basis of how Stalin, the former Georgian citizen, is dealt with. All around the country there are still followers of the dictator – which is not surprising at all. But it is rather astonishing that up to now no government considered it necessary to take an unequivocal stand on Stalin. Nobody wants to scare off voters and nobody wants to become a disparager of one's own country, quite apart from the fact that occasionally one's own family might be involved.

This ambivalence isn't only related to the dictator but also to the whole Red Terror issue in Georgia. Walking through the Soviet Occupation museum in Tbilisi, which is part of the Georgian national museum, it quickly becomes clear why the museum looks like it looks: The subjects of the discussion are the years 1921 to 1991, which are interpreted as the years of Soviet Occupation. A special focus is on the end of the First Republic in 1921. The visitors might take with them the following message: Georgia's democratic development was abruptly and maliciously terminated by the Bolsheviks coming from Russia, and without this episode today's Georgia would be a prosperous country in the middle of the European family of nations.

It seems to be rather typical that very small countries like Georgia define themselves by their closeness or distance from their respective big brother. All negative aspects can then be easily attributed to him. Their own people, country – a victim of extraneous interests. It also seems to be symptomatic, to me, that such constructs – for national states are nothing other than constructs – once they are spurned or

Challenging the national mainstream narrative/history from below – critical processing of one's own history

Societies that lived through totalitarian regimes created communities and people who follow. These were people with no independent opinions, who took for granted the propaganda around them without critical thinking. For the past 25 years in Georgia – but also in many other countries in the post-Soviet space – society has experienced the difficulties of breaking ties with that kind of life. The “follower” mentality is still very strong. What is really needed are critical-thinking young people, new generations that won't carry the burden of the past of their parents, but who still want to understand what has happened, to reconcile and build their present while being aware of the past. The role of adult education is in fostering critical thinking and to emphasise, especially in history-related projects, the “history from below” approach that values the personal story and experience, thus empowering citizens who have the awareness that they are creating their own grand narrative with critical and responsible actions.

released by their big brother turn to another protecting power. Too rarely do these countries use the freedom gained – e.g. that resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union – for a real process of self-discovery of their own third way. Of course the security concerns are too big and are not manageable alone. They almost never prefer a policy model which is built on self reliance (not necessarily in economic terms) and balance with their respective neighbours. Healthy nation-building doesn't take place, partly because the pressure needed for the process (see in comparison the analysis of the past in the old Federal Republic of Germany under the pressure of the allies) isn't applied by the old and new brothers at all or only insufficiently – you already know why! However, it remains a mystery how a country, which has so many skeletons in its own closets, can function successfully in the long term. Dealing with the post-Soviet region for more than 15 years now, I have noticed that these countries suffer substantially from a crumbling foundation and thus from their own

lifelong lies. The diagnosis of the facets of this disease would take us toward psychological research and would go beyond the scope of this text. Only this: The almost complete absence of critical thinking poses a considerable obstacle for Georgia's development.

SovLab

SovLab – registered as a non-governmental organisation in 2010 – is how the young historians from Soviet Past Research Laboratory are known and are becoming more and more popular in Georgia and the region. Being a new generation allows them to be more critical of the recent past, to raise questions and be open to explore difficult and controversial topics like Stalinism, terror and repressions in Georgia. Being young and not directly connected with the sensitive events from the past also gives them the openness to be trained to commit to initiatives that haven't existed before in their city, thus they created the alternative city tour revealing the history of Soviet terror and repressions in Tbilisi within the project *Red Terror Topography*. Other projects include *Virtual Platform – Rethinking the Soviet Past*, *Soviet Tbilisi*, *Lost stories: memories about oppressed women*, etc.

Efforts

With our efforts to find and process mass graves from the Soviet period, we wanted to provoke Georgian society to reflect and to start a critical dialogue with their own past. The project about mass graves has to be understood as a part of the larger project series dealing with the analysis of the past which is conducted in cooperation with our partner organisation Soviet Past Research Laboratory and is a result of the conference *Terror Topography – Rethinking Soviet Georgian History (Stalinism, Totalitarianism, Repressions)* which was conducted in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation. In 2009 the SovLab initiative group was found-

Travelling exhibition/growing archive

The travelling exhibition is a method used in several DVV International history projects (History project in South Eastern Europe, Turkish – Armenian reconciliation project, etc.) with the main aim of raising awareness and reflection about controversial issues in the broader public. Being open in a public space for a longer period of time, it gives the possibility to many people to come, see, reflect on their own and then discuss with others. It provides the space and time for contemplation, to hear your own thoughts, and yet is still open to view a different opinion. Usually within the adult education context, the exhibition is accompanied by additional public events, like lectures, workshops or discussions, which can approach the same topic and deepen reflection on the issue. Being a travelling exhibition means that it travels to several places, which requires efforts and good preparation. One option is that the exhibits travel physically, another is to print them in the different countries, if this is possible. The exhibition can travel crossing international borders, but also within a certain country. They can use static objects, posters, pictures, but they can be interactive as well, providing a possibility for the visitor to take different roles and to go from observer to actor, by giving his/her opinion on a question, for example. This kind of setting allows for the possibility of networking, questioning individual and collective memory, providing space for intergenerational dialogue and creating a multi-perspective about meanings. A related approach is the “growing archive”. Here the exhibition is not only travelling but also growing from one site to the next. At every exhibition site new items are included into the exhibition, the items can, for example, be handed over by visitors to the exhibition, in that way an interaction is generated between visitors and the exhibition.

ed – an association of young Georgian people interested in history. In 2010 the group registered as a non-governmental organisation. In recent years DVV International and SovLab have implemented several projects together regarding the analysis of the past. Here we focused mainly on the raising of awareness for the crimes of the Stalin era and less on profound scientific research. In doing so, SovLab succeeded in working out its own profile and its own identity. As an example, a travelling exhibition about persecuted women of the Stalin era can be mentioned. The illustrated stories of the fate of these women were presented throughout the country on extendable folding screens. The design of the exhibition was attractive; the whole exhibition was easy to transport and had a clear message. The fact that the twelve screens were even temporarily presented in the above-mentioned Stalin museum can be seen as a particular success. The design of alternative guided city tours through Tbilisi’s old town was equally successful. To this day native and international visitors follow the traces of Stalinism, terror

Alternative city tour

Alternative city tours in the frame of history work are usually established around the idea of preserving the meaning of a certain space and how it was used in the recent or more distant past. It could be a building or a set of buildings in a city, could be a street, a locality, where present usage hides a story that tells a lot about the past. Such tours reveal the stories of both buildings and the people who lived/worked in them, and can trace back the lives of several generations. Such a tour helps people start raising more questions and being more attentive to their surroundings. It supports the idea of informal education, that we can learn from everything around us. The alternative city tours use various kinds of methods to reveal the stories they tell – it could be through photographs of old times, through archival documents, through the stories of the passersby – these things bring the buildings/localities to life and makes them transmitters of meanings, being witnesses of both the past and present.

and persecution through Tbilisi. The high point of it – or better to say a low point – is the official residence of the head of the secret service, the disgusting Lavrentiy Beria, in Matschabeli Street.

Most of the projects from these past years were either financed by the Böll Foundation or by us, and a certain routine was arrived at. Although all the products of SovLab made a lot of sense, one could start to wonder if it would be possible to increase the external impact. One could also notice that the issues raised in the projects were indeed somehow difficult and that they deeply touched one or two people (I remember very well a contemporary witness who, having been a victim of persecution herself, visited the exhibition mentioned above) but at the same time they seemed not to hurt the wider public – and the big jolt through society failed to appear. In late 2013 the colleagues of SovLab came to our office to present a list of new project proposals. On this list you could also find the topic of the mass graves of the Red Terror. At that time I was astonished when they told me that the graves hadn't really been found or processed yet. The subject interested me immediately: firstly because of its

relevance for the critical analysis of the past in Georgia, and secondly because it seemed to be well-suited for adult education. So in 2014 SovLab started with the research of archive materials to find these places.

Narrow-mindedness?

At the beginning of 2014, Marc-Stephan Junge, a historian from Bochum, turned to us with a request for logistical support. The Ruhr University Bochum, in cooperation with Georgian institutions, had implemented a research project – funded by the Volkswagen Foundation – on the Red

Terror in the Georgian Soviet Republic. Under the title *The Stalinist mass persecutions 1937-1938. The perspective of the Georgian-Caucasian periphery*², they tried to understand and to document, from 2009 until 2015, how the centrally ordered terror had affected the Georgian periphery. Under the scientific guidance of Bernd Bonwetsch, Director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow, it was mainly Marc-Stephan Junge who researched locally in Georgia. Through extensive research in the Georgian archives, he came to the conclusion that the mass killings in Georgia were not just ordered and controlled centrally from Moscow but that ethnic minorities were specifically persecuted from Tbilisi. Therefore the Red Terror of the Stalinist apparatus was converted by the Georgian rulers around Lavrentiy Beria to serve national interests, so that especially Abkhazians, Adjarians and Laz were persecuted and murdered deliberately. It's not hard to image that this thesis wasn't very much to the taste of the Georgian counterparts of the project. They saw Georgia's national interests threatened by Junge's work and acted accordingly. Unfortunately, the reactions weren't articulated in an acceptable manner at all. The Georgian side then tried everything to prevent the publication of the controversial article entitled *Ethnos and Terror* in the project publication. Our office helped to deliver the various letters from the Ruhr University to the appropriate Georgian authorities and, alongside the Ruhr University, we also fought for the right of academic freedom and expression – explicitly without taking a content-related stand on the expressed theses. Then, in December 2014, a round-table entitled *Mass Repressions in Georgia 1937-1938* took place on the premises of Tbilisi's police academy, which belongs to the Georgian Ministry of Interior. It was attended by the directors of the academy and the archive of Georgia's Ministry of Interior, by members of the Abkhazian exile government and by representatives of the Georgian-Orthodox church and of the universities. In principle it was a tribunal which tried to intimidate in the "good old Soviet manner".

The round-table discussion was announced as a discussion to be held in English and Russian. The Georgian side used their own language almost exclusively – without providing any translation. The dialogue which had been originally planned didn't take place – not only because of the lack of willingness to speak at least in Russian – instead, the German colleagues were scolded bitterly. This provided a sad view into the internal functioning of the Georgian apparatus, which I didn't think would still be

2/ Junge, Tushuraschwili, Bonwetsch (Editors): *Bolschewistische Ordnung in Georgien: Der Große Terror in einer kleinen kaukasischen Republik* (Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Moskau), Berlin / Boston 2015.

Culture of remembrance

Responsibly preserving the memory of the recent or more distant past is a key task of a democratic society. Some of the ways in which adult education contributes in this process is through accepting that another perspective is possible (multi-perspective approach), making debates/discussions/workshops of different kinds to foster critical thinking and processes of questioning the status quo in a society, contributing with such discussions to opening the archives, acknowledging the roles of both victims and perpetrators, understanding the mechanisms of the regimes and finding space for everybody's story. It is well summarised by the Bulgarian scholar Daniela Koleva: "The memory of the traumatic past has to be preserved as a condition of justice for the victims, as a guarantee that the past won't repeat and history won't be censored, and as a basis for democracy. The recognition of past injustice and taking responsibility for it is a reflective and self-critical act that makes the community truly democratic and stronger."

as nationalist and as Soviet in style. The round-table showed quite plainly where some of the officials in Georgia still stand and how unenlightened and un-European they are when it comes to matters regarding the fundamental questioning of their own nationalist narrative. This episode also shows that the extensive efforts to approach European values and ideas have so far only scratched the surface. All Georgian state institutions are regarded as European today, but behind the facades and in people's minds you can find many things that you would have assumed wouldn't still exist 25 years after the end of the Soviet Union.

It is of course common transformation narrative to identify situations and attitudes as "frumpily Soviet" when they don't seem to be modern and western enough. Many of these resentments are probably based at least as much on even older attitudes. The article has also received justified critique – content-related and especially method-related – from other directions, so that it had to be revised by the author again. There is especially a doubt that the relatively small number of victims can support such a far-reaching thesis. If the Georgian side would have relied from the beginning on

a critical but constructive dialogue among colleagues, they would have achieved much more in this regard. But in the end the German side didn't prevail and so *Ethnos and Terror* was not included in the Georgian translation of the book. They waived the first publication of the article in order to print it later in Georgian and distribute it on their own.

The 18th kilometre

After extensive research in various archives had been carried out by Sov-Lab, it was certain that there are three places in Tbilisi where the existence

of larger graves can be presumed and where, in case of doubt, it would be worthwhile to dig. The findings of these investigations were used by Irakli Khvadagiani for his article *Looking for Lost Graves. Mass Graves of Victims of Soviet Repressions from 1921-1953 in Tbilisi*. In that article he identifies the following locations: (1) The territory of the former Akademgorodok (little academic town) in Saburtalo, a district of Tbilisi, (2) in the district of Vake under a sports field which belongs to the Ministry of Sports and (3) in Soghanlugi, a place situated at the outskirts of the city which was and is used for military purposes.

In cooperation with the state forensic institute, SovLab carried out a first analysis of the soil in Akademgorodok next to the Tbilisi Circus. But unfortunately the scanning of the ground rendered no usable results. Almost the whole territory is now the object of considerable transformation (huge hotel construction) so that it can be assumed that further research there will not provide any other results. There are numerous oral reports of construction workers who stated that they have found bones in excavations, but in almost all cases these findings remained undocumented and without consequences.

The situation regarding the sports field of the ministry was similarly complicated. At first SovLab was forbidden to investigate there, and then the test bores by Polish experts didn't render any indications for graves. In consequence all efforts were afterwards focused on Soghanlugi. In this case the sheer size of the eligible area was and still is the main problem. Already in the early nineties, eye-witnesses of the shootings were interviewed in the surrounding region of the presumed burial and killing site. One of them reported that at night the convicts were executed and buried at a place 18 kilometres from Tbilisi and 8 kilometres from the village Soghanlugi. Based on this report, a place corresponding to this location information was identified as a mass grave. Back then the local media reported about this, and until now many citizens of Tbilisi associate this little valley on the left side of the road to Rustavi, an industrial town located east of Tbilisi, with the mass executions of the Stalinist period. The colleagues of SovLab also dealt with this legend and questioned it critically. Their doubts were caused especially by the fact that the translation of the statements given by an Azerbaijani eye-witness hadn't been carried out professionally at that time and that the place supposedly identified was easily visible from a street which was already very busy in the thirties. In addition, the inexperienced interviewers had used leading questions.

Long searches, in the course of which all hints and all sources were critically reviewed and then "superimposed", resulted in another place being possible. At this new location the People's Commissariat for Internal

Affairs (NKVD), a forerunner of the KGB, had built up a farm for self-sustenance. Today the former farm lies fallow, only smaller parts are used by the Georgian military for practice purposes. Another Azerbaijani contemporary witness, Gulo Birmamedov, said at the end of his interview about this place: “Nothing grows in this place. They tried to plant trees – with no result. The same for barley – it gave no shoots. Only wild grass, beautiful flowers and reeds grow here [...]”³”

Interviewing eyewitnesses

When dealing with controversial issues from the recent past, a key source of information are the eyewitnesses. The preservation of the personal story and experiences of people who took part or just witnessed contested events from the past is enriching in various ways. More and more professional historians nowadays are opening up and valuing the oral history method, thus searching for opportunities to bring an additional perspective in order to better understand past events. In that way, the recorded interviews themselves become new historical documents. Although sometimes considered as manipulative or subjective and one-sided, the story of an eyewitness can serve as a complementary source, adding a piece to the puzzle of understanding the recent past better. Being personal, it touches the heart of the listener/interviewer/reader faster and at the same time transforms the grand narrative to a very concrete one. It opens questions connected with responsibility, choices and blame; it can heal or open wounds.

After it was clear to us now where the graves were located, we started some sampling analyses with the soil scanner from the forensic institute, but due to the enormous size of the territory to be investigated – several square kilometres – the scans again led nowhere. Later on Polish experts from the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (which is the official full name) were consulted. With the help of the latest methods and techniques (among them drone technology) small parts of the area were examined, but again there was no success. At the same time, the indications became more certain that we had found the right place. But at the same time we had to admit that we were not in a position to handle the task adequately: As an adult education organisation with very limited resources, we realised that we wouldn't get any further.

Public

After I understood the above, I would have liked to include the broader Georgian public into the project in order to

^{3/} Irakli Khvadagiani: Looking for Lost Graves. Mass Graves of Victims of Soviet Repressions from 1921-1953 in Tbilisi. (unpublished article), Tbilisi 2014, page 30.

transform the topic to one of greater public interest, believing that this way could probably have created a critical mass and could have forced the Georgian state and the government to become an active player. This approach, on the other hand, has at least two big risks: (1) If it would work to activate the government, it would most likely imply a loss of control for us. I say this because I am aware of the tendency of governments to manipulate history in order to make it fit the ruling national narrative. (2) In addition, I had to ask myself how I intended to create a broad public interest without having yet excavated a single human bone. Having lived quite a few years in the country, I knew how difficult it would be to mobilise larger parts of Georgian society for such a topic.

Therefore, we decided to take another path: Not the establishment of a broader public, but the inclusion of scientists, experts and practitioners, locally and internationally. In this regard, we first supported the research visit of the already mentioned experts from Poland and then organised a conference and two academic schoolings for young scholars.

The international conference *20th Century Mass Graves – Witnesses of Political Violence*, implemented in close cooperation with the Ruhr University Bochum and supported by the Volkswagen Foundation, brought together scholars from all over the world in November 2015. Particularly interesting and relevant from my point of view were the substantial contributions from Memorial Russia. This was highly relevant because our Russian colleagues deal with the same history of the homicidal regime, the Soviet Union in its Stalinist era, and in addition, both of the current regimes in Russia and Georgia have an unfortunately quite similar treatment of the past in common. With the (significant) difference that the work of Memorial Russia meanwhile has cer-

The art of asking difficult/sensitive questions

The questions are more important than the answers. They are needed to start opening the closed books of the past and challenging the national mainstream narrative. In the context of Georgia, here are some thought-provoking questions:

- Was it Russian/Soviet occupation, or were we part of a process we (co-)determined ourselves?
- How do we deal with the legacy of Soviet times? Should we talk about the Soviet times or better remain silent about them?
- How can we come to a sophisticated analysis of the Soviet past, an analysis which is able to incorporate shades of grey as well as black and white?
- Can the old heroes also be the new ones? Was Stalin one of the most important Georgians or a criminal dictator?
- How do we want to deal with people who were part of the old regime, those who committed crimes in the past, especially if they or their fellow-travellers have decision-making power today?
- How do we want to explain what happened to our younger generation?

tainly been fundamentally hindered by the Russian government (at the end of 2015 they even tried to close down that organisation completely) and that, on the other hand, this type of interference has until now not occurred to our Georgian colleagues. That could be just because of the fact that the work of these organisations and individuals has not yet been widely recognised and discussed in Georgian society.

In addition, two academic schoolings took place, one in autumn 2015 in Georgia and the other in spring 2016 in Germany. In cooperation with the Federal Foundation for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in East Germany (Stiftung Aufarbeitung) and the German War Graves Commission (Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) we were able to facilitate an exchange between Georgian students/scholars and international experts on the topic Stalin Era Mass Graves in the Georgian cities of Telavi and Tbilisi. Another group – this time participants from all three south-Caucasian republics and their German colleagues were involved – visited sites of remembrance and history education like the former concentration camp Buchenwald or the Topography of Terror in Germany. This study-trip was supported by the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future⁴ (Erinnerung – Verantwortung – Zukunft, EVZ) and the main goal was to learn more about a meaningful culture of remembrance as it exists in today's Germany.

What will actually happen when the mass graves are found, opened and analysed? How would one like to remember the dead? What type of culture of remembrance will be chosen by Georgia, Georgian society or the relatives of the killed (if they are asked at all!)? I think there is a big risk that a simple memorial stone with an engraved inscription will be put there and that the whole thing will then be forgotten again. That means that the mass graves project is by no means ended with the opening of the graves – strictly speaking, that's exactly when it starts. It is only then that the interactive methods of adult education and the approaches enabling an adequate culture of remembrance can come to full power.

Advantage through remembrance

I will not tire of repeating, over and over, that a critical processing of one's own history is not only in the interest of the victims – whether the victims are from their own population or from another nation – but it is also in the core interest of the perpetrators and their legal, respectively moral, successors. It is a crucial part of West Germany's success-story that we had

4/ <http://www.stiftung-evz.de/eng/the-foundation.html>

Study trips and history learning on the site

Study trips are very popular in adult education, as well as in the work focused on dealing and processing the past. They serve as intensive learning opportunities, bringing together both new knowledge and experience, and also a new perspective to the issue being studied. Usually done outside the habitual places of living of the participants, very often internationally, they provide a neutral space to reflect on the sensitive past through a new angle. Showing the experience of another country helps to better understand your own situation, to broaden your view and gather ideas for the next steps. It develops analytical, critical thinking, observation skills and raises many questions. Usually such trips combine academic lectures with visits to museums, history workshops, visiting places of remembrance, work on memorials, etc. Visits of that kind provoke questions like: What evidence from the past is being exhibited, and what is its message? What topics are being addressed? Which topics are missing and why? How does this help us to understand how the past is constructed in the present?

to, sometimes very painfully, process our past intensively and constantly. Processing of the past, and a critical culture of remembrance are part of the foundations of the Federal Republic of Germany and our present prosperity⁵.

I am, in addition, sure that an honest processing of the recent and contemporary history of Georgia could in the long term help to bring stability and prosperity to the people and the country. Unfortunately, I have to close at this point with a pessimistic assessment concerning the feasibility of that approach, given that the current international situation is extremely polarised and chauvinistic thinking is gaining the upper hand in many places, not only in the Caucasus.

^{5/} For a country, like for example Turkey, a critical confrontation of the country's own past could be a key for a functioning future order. In our Armenian-Turkish dialogue projects, I continually tried to give an understanding to the Turkish side that they should recognise the Armenian genocide because of their own interests and not only because of compassion for the Armenian side. Now we can observe – just to stay with the example Turkey for a moment – what happens if old wounds reopen again and again and if their bleeding is fuelled by the same old half-truths, resentments and falsifications of history. In the long run, reconciliation will not work without a culture of dialogue among the different ethnic groups in the country. In doing so it will be important to honestly and critically revisit one's own past. Without a culture of acknowledgment of one's own mistakes against these groups, no peace will be possible. Let us in this context think again of the Armenian genocide and its 100th anniversary in 2015; despite the fact that so many years have passed since 1915, its remembrance is still very vivid and vibrant; one could even argue that the fight for the historical truth has even become stronger in the last decade. To hope that time heals all wounds can sometimes be a dangerous fallacy.

Adult education approaches and methods of dealing with the past

For more than 20 years, DVV International has been working in the sphere of bridging the fields of adult education and history – dealing with the past through various projects in different regions (Germany, Russia, Southeastern Europe, Central Asia, South Caucasus, Turkey-Armenia, etc.). Starting with approaches like valuing the individual and his/her personal story and experience, they have created room for dialogue (on many levels between generations, disciplines, concepts) and created a culture of deep learning exchange based on interactive methods for listening, reflecting, understanding, (e)valuating the experiences of everyone involved. The methods used are context-oriented, they are adapted to each individual setting, promote active participation, both critical and sensitive to the truth of the other, thus bringing more than one perspective into the learning process, following the multi-perspective principle.

However, we will go on struggling, in the scope of our possibilities, for a critical reflection of the past in general and for the processing of the mass graves in Georgia in particular. We urgently need support for that undertaking – support from the people in Georgia and from the international community.

Identity, nation building, processing the past for the sake of the future

Dealing with the recent past in countries in transition from totalitarian regimes to democracy, from wars to post-conflict situations, is an extremely sensitive issue. Hence, democracy is not possible without a critical approach of that country to its own past. Adult education uses a vast number of methods to stimulate the processing of the past (some of them are explained in the previous boxes). A crucial point, not easy at all, is to start with the processing of its own identity – this can concern identities of states, governments, ethnic, religious and other large groups, but also the identity of individuals. These two levels are often interlinked: an identity-crisis of a newly established state can also lead to an identity-crisis of its population and/or some individual citizens. People may be oppressed. People may be traumatised by war, conflict or unjust living conditions. They may be injured and looking for help and/or neglected by society and/or their government. All these things affect the willingness and ability of the individual to act. Thus, adult education sees its role in the empowerment process of these individuals – through creating the space for their stories to be listened to, to acknowledging their experience, through bringing them to a broader public, to bringing them back home.

Irakli Khvadagiani

Looking for lost graves in Georgia – The example of Saburtalo

In his article the author – founding member and chief researcher of the Georgian NGO SovLab – describes a pilot project aiming at locating Soviet era mass graves in Georgia. By comparing archive material, literature, aerial photographs, maps and interviews, Sov-Lab managed to identify an area most likely containing mass graves dating back to the 1920s and 1930s. A partial scanning of the area by ground radar and following test-digs gave no results so far, yet a large portion of the area still remains unexamined. Though the method established by SovLab has been approved by international experts and shown first results (in narrowing down a search area), more funds and support is needed to continue the search for Soviet era mass graves in Georgia.

Background: Methods and sources

Despite the collapse of the USSR and the following independence of Georgia in 1991, the graves of those victims of the Soviet terror who had been killed during the years 1921-1953 have so far not been located in Georgia. In 2012, the NGO “Soviet Past Research Laboratory” (SovLab) started their research to identify such places. Working with very limited resources, SovLab developed a combined method, based the use of archive material containing information about “death fields” with oral and some alternative sources. The researchers relied on archival documents from the social democratic Georgian government in exile (in Paris from the 1920s until the 1960s), which contain valuable information forwarded by members of the anti-Bolshevik resistance movement in Georgia. These documents form a main source for information about Soviet terror in Georgia and the identification of possible grave sites.

Identification of Saburtalo as a possible area for mass shootings

Comparing information derived from such sources, an area named “Saburtalo” (nowadays a district of Tbilisi) was identified as the most likely place for such a grave site, since – according to at least 15 different and independent sources – death sentences had been carried out there during the 1920s. As a matter of fact, the first direct reference to Saburtalo was made in a printed immigrant publication of 1927, yet – according to the catalogue of sources – the issue of executions taking place there was known and mentioned on the informal level and in private conversations. Still, the rather general reference to the site made it difficult to identify the exact location of the graves.

Narrowing down the search area within Saburtalo

Between 1900 and 1920, Tbilisi expanded to the north and north-west up to the Vere district and approached a settlement locally known as “Akhalsheeni”, which was located within the Saburtalo area. During the 1910s – after numerous requests by Akhalsheeni residents – the Saburtalo area (including Akhalsheeni) was integrated into the city boundaries. After the “Sovietisation” of 1921, Saburtalo was considered as the 13th district of Tbilisi. In those days, farming in the Saburtalo area was limited to the surroundings of Akhalsheeni and a small site along the so-called “Military Road” (located within the triangle now formed by Merab Kostava St. and Pekini Ave.).

Most of the sources dating back to the 1920s (a total number of 6) refer to Saburtalo as a shooting site in a rather general way. Two sources give more specific information: The first one consists of a report written by a local liaison member of the Social-Democratic Party of Georgia in 1922, describing the nature of Soviet repression in Georgia. In this report, a former Red Army group sent from the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) to the Georgian SFSR for executions is mentioned as a special case, with the execution site described as “Saburtalo valley¹”. The second report was written in 1923 by another liaison person and describes how a simulated execution was organised and carried out with the goal being to intimidate and recruit a prisoner as an informant. The site of this simulated execution is described as “Saburtalo, Kura River bank²”. (The city of Tbilisi was founded on the banks of a river called “Kura” in Russian and “Mtkvari” in Georgian.)

Judging from these two sources, the former execution site in Saburtalo would have been located on the flatland between the Military Road and the cliffs of the Kura/Mtkvari River bank.

To specify the area still further, reports about the composition and geography of the “Saburtalo” district during the 1920s were also of major importance. By the late 1910s, the Saburtalo area included several small communities with a total number of approx. 10,000 residents. Still, the largest part of Saburtalo consisted of agricultural land and gardens. Water was supplied by a system of irrigation canals running down from the so-called “Lisi-Lake” (located on a slope of the Lisi ridge above the eastern part of Tbilisi). This irrigation system carried generous amounts of water, actually causing the swamping of the Saburtalo lowlands. Particularly difficult situations used to occur during the spring floods, when water started streaming down the slope causing the canals located in the lower parts of the Saburtalo plains to overflow. (The former irrigation system network is still visible today with the main avenues of Saburtalo district following the same layout-plan.) The increasing number of mosquitoes in the swamped areas caused a malaria epidemic which claimed 600 lives in 2-3 months in the spring of 1921. The rapid spread of the disease and increasing mortality figures frightened the residents to such a degree that the populated parts of Saburtalo became nearly empty.

The problem of swamps and malaria remained unsolved until 1926, when medical and agricultural activities were implemented. The major part

1/ National Archives of Georgia (NAG), The Central Historical Archive of Georgia, Find No. 1861 (Administration office of the Georgian Democratic Republic Government), extract No. 3 (Emigrant collection), case No. 61: 133.

2/ NAG, The Central Historical Archive of Georgia, Find No. 2117 (Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the Social-Democratic Workers Party of Georgia) Excerpt No. 1, case No. 180: 5.

of the swamp was dried up through a system of drainage channels and the people returned gradually to their districts. However, parts of the area remained as swamp until the end of the 1930s³.

A map drawn in 1923, showing the spread of malaria in Saburtalo, enables us to determine the areas swamped during the years 1921-1925 with great accuracy. By analysing this map and comparing it with the current surface structure we can conclude that the farming areas close to the “Military Road” were inaccessible by motor vehicles⁴. It is highly unlikely that executions would have been carried out at a place inaccessible to military vehicles.

How the shootings took place – A perpetrator’s narrative

Another – hitherto unknown and unpublished – report written by a local liaison of the Social-Democratic Party of Georgia to the exile government in Paris in the autumn of 1921 gives important information for the identification of execution sites (both in general and particularly in the Saburtalo area). The report takes the form of an essay describing the activities of the Soviet punitive apparatus in Georgia, giving special attention to the execution of prisoners. An officer named Petin who used to belong to a “Cheka Squad” carrying out death sentences but was later himself sentenced for a breach of duty is given as the source of this information. The authenticity and accuracy of Petin’s words is confirmed by archive material about the people he mentions, particularly his direct victim⁵. To quote from the report: “It was evening when they brought executioner Petin to our basement [in the prison]. The prisoners continued to speak allegorically and

3/ “Historical and geographical importance of Saburtalo medical map of 1923”, Koba Kharadze Collection of researches Vakhushti Bagrationi Institute of Geography at Tbilisi State University.

4/ During this time, spring floods sometimes even covered certain sections of the Military Road in Saburtalo. NAG, Tbilisi archive, Fund No. 5, Excerpt No.1, case No. 310.

5/ The “Cheka Collegium” published a list of persons executed from February to December (included) in the newspaper “Communist” on December 30, 1921, where Alexander Ivanovich Gromov is named as No. 81. His criminal case is available in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) as well. As a matter of fact, the initials of the Gromov named in the document do not match with the archival case. This discrepancy is most likely caused by transcribing illegible handwriting to a typewriter. (The document used by SovLab is a typewritten copy of the handwritten information received from Georgia.) During our research, we often found remarks in the reprinted text claiming that certain sections of the originally handwritten text had not been transcribed due to their illegibility. This is not too surprising, since the clandestine correspondence was written in small letters on a tiny piece of paper and had often been damaged during the journey.

looked at him contemptuously. We did not know whether he was arrested or had been deliberately infiltrated. We recognised that he was wearing R. Gromov's blouse, who had been shot a few days previously. Our fear went away when we realised that the Cheka butcher Petin had really been arrested because of drinking [alcohol on duty]. Petin noticed our fear and also the fact that we had recognised Gromov's blouse. He turned out to be honest and admitted everything. We listened as he talked: 'The squad working at Georgian Cheka consists completely of Russians, though here and there certain elements of other nationalities can be met in the squad, mainly Armenians and Jews. Our squad guards the Cheka's victim-prisoners and also escorts the prisoners to be executed. We commit everything, and you may wonder: Why? You are staring at my blouse – that's nothing. We shot him and I put on his blouse – I might be also shot later, and someone else will put it on. You think commandants carry out executions – it is not their duty, and if they do it sometimes, this can be explained by their love of this art and not by their duties. The shooting is our duty, the commandants bring the sentenced prisoners out, undress them down to their underwear – sometimes including these, too – and tie their hands with ropes, then tying the prisoners together and putting them in trucks to hand them over to us. We bring them to a cemetery. We have two of such cemeteries at the lower meadows of Ortachala and Saburtalo, where a pre-dug pit is ready when we come. In front of the pit the soldiers undress them [the prisoners] one by one – including underwear – then we put them in front of the pit, shoot them from behind in the back of the head with revolvers and they automatically fall into the pit. When we shoot a single person, the second one looks at him and roars madly, but we made them all kick the bucket anyway and strew earth over their heads.'

'Isn't it possible that a person shot by this procedure remains alive and still gets [dumped] in the pit?' – asked a prisoner to the butcher Petin, turning pale.

'It is possible' answered Petin indifferently and added: Though it rarely happens, as this place – he pointed at the main part of the brain at the back of the head – is of such a nature that [a shot directed there] causes an immediate lethal outcome. This is a common Cheka system, result of an anatomic finding, so that we don't have to waste too many bullets and if it still happens from time to time that one is not completely dead – so what... He will end up dead anyway after we have dumped earth on him⁶."

6/ NAG, The Central Historical Archive of Georgia, Find No. 2117 (Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the Social-Democratic Workers Party of Georgia), Excerpt No. 1, case No. 4: 34-35.

To sum up the main points of Petin's narrative: The "Cheka squad" was directly responsible for the shooting procedure. It received the sentenced persons, transported them to the selected place and executed the sentence. The execution procedure is described as follows: A large pit is dug beforehand. The victims are stripped naked, their hands being tied together. They are led up to the dig one by one and shot in the back of the head with a firearm, according to rules established in order to achieve an instant lethal result by a single shot. The place which has been selected for this procedure is given as Saburtalo.

The firing squad responsible for the shootings

The "Cheka squad" mentioned by Petin was officially named "Emergency Commission battalion" and consisted of a cavalry squadron as well as three infantry squads⁷. It was given the status of a separate battalion of the Cheka of the Georgian SSR by 1921 and thus formed part of the internal troops of the "United Political Department" which represented a specialised, highly disciplined and combat-ready military unit of the security agencies. Its main responsibilities consisted of guarding security agencies, institutions and bodies of both state and party facilities of strategic importance and politicians as well as the military support of operations of the security forces. Yet Petin's words reveal that the carrying out of death sentence executions formed part of the duties of the interior troops. This is confirmed by the fact that the protocol for executing sentences was signed by the head of the Commandant's troops, the head of the expedition division and a representative of the commanding part of the squad⁸. Most of the descriptions of the execution procedures mention, that "Red Army" or "squad" soldiers control the execution sites and escort the victims on their way to these sites.

The "Cheka" squad was also affected by the reorganisation of the armed forces which took place between 1922 and 1938. From 1922-1924 the interior troops in the Georgian SSR and Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (in existence between 1922 and 1936) were reorganised and integrated into the newly formed 8th Cavalry Regiment (Legion) of the OGPU-troops⁹. (The Joint State Political Directorate – abbreviated in Russian as OGPU – served as the secret police of the USSR from 1923

7/ In the second case it is mentioned as a "separate regiment".

8/ All execution protocols should be reviewed by years according to the appropriate selection, in order to confirm this.

9/ In Russian sources sometimes referred to as the 55th and 59th division.

until 1934.) In 1934, the regiment was renamed as “8th Regiment of the USSR Transcaucasian Internal State Commissariat Troops” – the name becoming synonymous with State terror, with the “fearsome name” of the regiment being still alive in the memories of the older generations. Though the regiment was based in Tbilisi, its members were never recruited from local military personnel¹⁰.

The barracks of the Cheka squad 8th Regiment in Saburtalo

According to various sources, the Cheka squad 8th Regiment was based in the former artillery barracks located between the Military Road and rocky coast of Mtkvari River. (Just above today’s Heroes Square)¹¹. Since the surrounding territory was mostly swamp and thus inaccessible, the execution of death sentences most probably took place within the base, with the corpses also being buried there.

Around 1935, the 8th Regiment was transferred to a new base (built behind Navtlughi railway station) while the 145th Mountain-Rifle Regiment now occupied the artillery barracks. Aerial photographs taken during the second half of the 1940s show that the swamp area had been dried out and used for building purposes. Since the formerly isolated military barracks were now located within a residential area, plans for erecting an “academic quarter” on the area were designed but only partially realised during the 1950s¹². As a matter of fact, parts of the former military buildings remain until today¹³. According to one of the two architects of the “academic quarter” (Vakhtang Tsukhishvili), military personnel and their

¹⁰/ The attempt of the second chairman in succession of the Extraordinary Commission, Kote Cincadze, to staff the “Cheka squad” with local recruits was a failure. (The first chairman, George Elisabedashvili, had worked in this position actually for only two or three weeks while the Extraordinary Commission of Georgia existed on paper only.)

¹¹/ Comparison of two independent sources: 1) recollections of Solomon Zaldastanishvili (a representative of the group of military commanders of the August rebellion of 1924), in: Zaldastanishvili, Solomon: *The Georgian Uprising in 1924*, Tbilisi 1994 (reprint of the original edition from 1956), 2) A plan for an uprising developed in Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1922-23 by Valiko Jugheli, in: NAG, *The Central Historical Archive of Georgia*, Find No. 2117 (Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the Social-Democratic Workers Party of Georgia), Excerpt No. 1, Case No. 102.

¹²/ NAG, Archive of newest history of Georgia – Science and technical division, Find No. 40, Excerpt No. 4-1, case No. 8302-8314.

¹³/ Under the construction of the highway connecting Celyuskinty Bridge, Heroes Square and Station Street in the 1930s, a new road was built through the area of the artillery barracks. When a circus building was constructed in the southern part of the area (just above the Heroes Square) a little later, part of the old barracks were used as an auxiliary building for it.

families continued to live in the barracks during the construction of the “academic quarter”. When asked about possible mass graves in the area during an interview with SovLab, Mr. Tsukhishvili could not recall any traces of burials, nor was there any interference from the military and security agencies during the construction of the academic buildings. Still, when interviewed by SovLab, an archaeologist (Guram Kipiani) explained that one of the other of the two architects (George Lezhava) had mentioned in a private conversation that lots of bones had been found when the ground for the building of the Library of Academy of Sciences (as part of “academic quarter”) was prepared.

An eyewitness speaks

One of the oldest residents of Saburtalo, Kukuri Gogorishvili – his family was one of those few having lived in the vicinity of the artillery barracks – connected the military area to shootings in an interview with SovLab. Despite being 88 years old when interviewed, his memory slightly scattered, he was able to recall in quite detail, what the neighbouring military base had represented to the local community. During the interview with SovLab, we never explained the reason of our interest in this issue, nor did we mention any shooting sites. Nevertheless, when he mentioned that his uncle had fallen victim to the mass repressions of 1937-38, we asked him to what extent local citizens had been aware of mass executions and where such things could have been carried out. As an answer, he pointed at the neighbouring former military base and talked about gunshots at night, the strict control of the military base (though he managed to creep into the base as a child with some playmates, resulting in the loss of an arm when some explosives he found exploded in his hands) and used a particular vocabulary connected to the Soviet era mass repressions (mentioning “the political”, etc.).

Scanning the ground – First attempts at a test-site

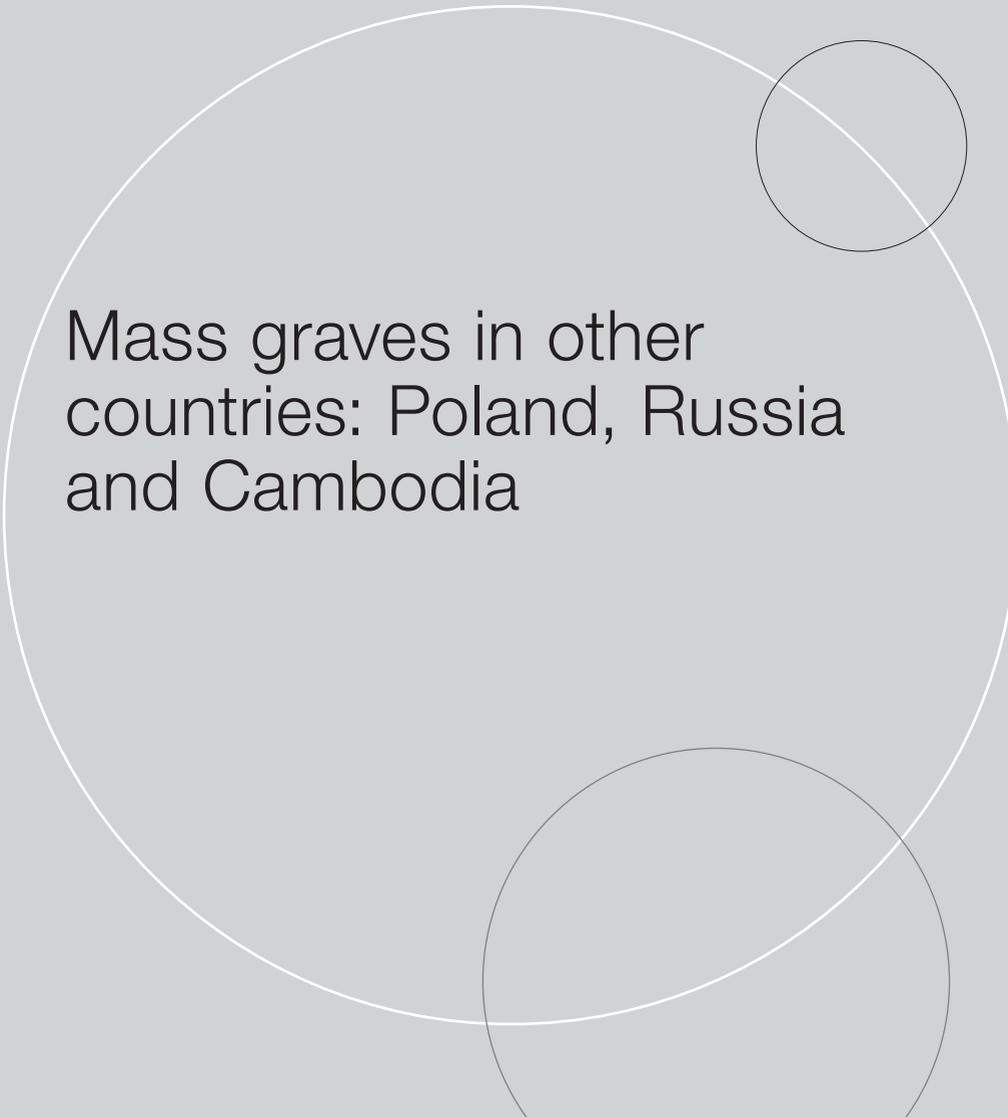
Based on the results from archive research, oral interviews and comparison of maps and aerial photographs, SovLab decided to search parts of the ground of the former military barracks. A screening of the test-site by Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) as well as some test-digs were carried out in cooperation with the Levan Samkharauli National Forensic Bureau (NFB) during the summer of 2014 in the yard of the National Centre for Manuscripts. Even though no positive results could be obtained, a method

for the search for mass graves had been established during this first attempt. Hopefully, other parts of the same area will be examined in the near future.

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A decorative graphic consisting of three overlapping circles. A large white circle is centered on the page. A smaller white circle overlaps its top-right edge. Another smaller white circle overlaps its bottom-right edge. The background is a light gray.

Mass graves in other countries: Poland, Russia and Cambodia

Justyna Sawicka

Source material and archaeological research regarding victims of the communist terror during the years 1944-1956 in Poland

The article describes a project on “Searching for unknown places of burial of the victims of communist terror from the years 1944-1956” which was implemented in Poland in 2011 as a cooperation between the Institute of National Remembrance, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and the Ministry of Justice. During this project, a method based on the knowledge and close cooperation of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, forensic doctors, and geneticists was developed. The author explains this method and its use by giving examples from various project sites and describes the support given by members of the project group to a project in Georgia.

In 2011, a nationwide scientific and research project named *Searching for unknown places of burial of the victims of the communist terror from the years 1944-1956* was implemented in Poland. The implementation followed a cooperation agreement between the three institutions to combine their efforts to find the graves of the victims of the Stalinist regime: the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and the Ministry of Justice.

The objective of the project was to find the graves of those executed in state prisons (following the Moscow Trials verdicts), murdered in the offices of the Secret Political Police or in military barracks because of their resistance to the new system. Moreover, the project included the scientific documentation and genetic identification of the victims as well as the decent burial of their remains.

The project was based on research conducted since 2003 by Krzysztof Szwaigrzyk, Ph.D., from the Wrocław branch of the IPN under the title *Places of oppression and torment*. Until 2011, archaeological research and exhumation work had been completed on prison burial plots (No. 81A and 120) located on the edge of the Osobowice Cemetery in Wrocław in Lower Silesia. As a result, the remains of 299 persons who had been executed following court verdicts or died in Wrocław prisons from 1945 to 1956 had been found and exhumed. In 2012, on the basis of the knowledge gained in Wrocław, exhumation works were carried out in the place which has been, to date, the symbol of Stalinist terror in Poland – burial plot “Ł” of the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw, which in the 1940s and 1950s had been a deserted meadow right outside the walls. 300 people had been buried there from 1948-1956, including political prisoners kept at the Remand Centre of the Ministry of Public Security of Poland (at Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw). The work carried out during IPN’s project resulted in similar searches in more than 20 places all over Poland, which led to the exhumation of more than 700 victims of the Stalinist regime, making it possible to restore the names of 45 victims on the basis of DNA tests.

Due to the specific nature of the research, an interdisciplinary method was developed in a close cooperation between historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, forensic pathologists, and geneticists. The first step was an investigation based on archive material from the collection of the Ministry of Public Security, the Main Directorate of Information as well as the prison and court administration.

It is because of this material that we know, for example, that in 1948, due to a directive of the Prison Department of the Ministry of Public Security, prison authorities were obliged to regulate the issue of handling the corpses of those prisoners who had been executed following court ver-

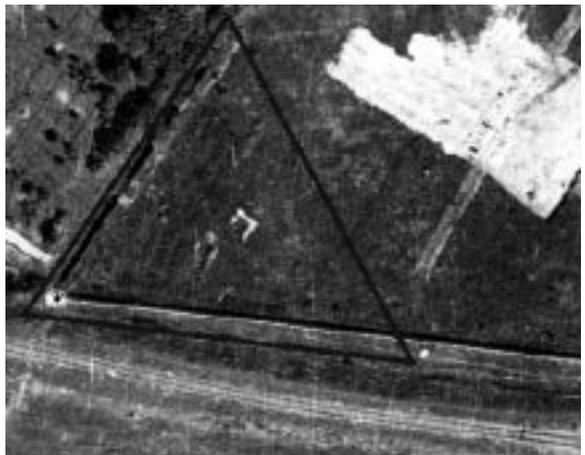
dicts or had died in prisons, by creating a separate burial plot in the communal cemetery. (Ossowski, Szleszkowski & Szwagrzyk 2013: 202) In this case, old cemetery ledgers which contained the personal data of prisoners whose corpses had been brought to the cemetery, along with the date and number of the burial plot (or even the specific location of the plot) proved to be an invaluable source for analysis, even though the graves were not marked in any way. Before this – separate plots were introduced in 1948 – if a cemetery was chosen as the place of burial, then the corpses were buried on the plots reserved for victims of suicides, persons with unknown identity (UP), post-autopsy remains from hospitals, or persons from public nursing homes near the cemetery walls or in the cemetery’s vicinity.

The difficulty of identifying such “prison plots” on cemeteries nowadays derives mainly from the fact that they had been used for newer graves since the 1980s. As a result, potential exploration work can only be carried out on an area of not more than the width of a cemetery alley (photograph 1).

Aerial photographs can prove helpful in locating the area of the developed prison burial plots, as was the case with two necropolises in Warsaw: 1) the Powązki Military Cemetery and 2) the cemetery at Wałbrzyska Street in Służew. The first photograph (taken during an air raid over Warsaw in 1955) clearly shows diagonal dark zones which mark rows of graves. The



Photograph 1: Archaeological and exhumation work, Wrocław, Osobowice Cemetery, Poland



Photograph 2: A fragment of an aerial photograph from the collection of the Central Military Archive, Warsaw, 1955

presence of graves in this place was confirmed by archaeological excavations (photograph 2). During the 1960s, the meadows that can be seen on the photograph were covered with a layer of soil and rubble and put into use as part of a communal cemetery. The area was later transformed into a military cemetery where during the 1980s some of the honoured commanders of the People's Troops of Poland (LWP) and Stalinist judges had been buried as well. Only approximately a dozen square meters remained for research, yet during three stages of archaeological and exhumation work, the remains of 201 people were exhumed, including those of soldiers of the Polish Army, the Home Army, the Freedom and Independence (WiN) organisation, the National Armed Forces as well as the remains of people murdered in the cellars of the prison at Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw.

During Communist Party rule, places inaccessible for third parties were often chosen for burial of the corpses of the victims – as for example military training areas, prison and custody yards or Secret Political Police offices (photograph 3). The corpses of those killed in combat with



Photograph 3: Corpse of Lt. Zdzisław Badocha killed in a raid by the Secret Political Police, Civic Militia, and Internal Security Corps after transfer to the Secret Political Police office in Sztum

the Secret Political Police, Internal Security Corps or Civic Militia were buried in the woods. Sources telling about the transfer of bodies to anatomy facilities for scientific purposes have been preserved. (Szwagrzyk 2003)

A next stage of the work consisted in the examination of archive materials supplemented by the evidence of witnesses and then compared with reality – the so-called exploratory studies which included LIDAR maps analysis, geophysical surveys (magnetic and geo-radar) as well as intrusive field work¹.

Opencast works over a wide area are the most effective method in archaeology. Preceded by surveys in the form of excavations or drillings (photograph 4), they provide a unique possibility for obtaining the full picture of spatial, stratigraphic, and chronological relationships of the examined terrain and allow for a relatively quick and precise elimination of incorrectly selected areas. (Trzciński 2013: 113-186)

It was decided that such complementary methods (among other approaches) would be used when, in March 2016, exploration began of the



Photograph 4: Archaeological drillings made during the search for the mass graves of the soldiers of the National Armed Forces, Barut, Poland

^{1/} LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) forms a method of aerial laser scanning.

mass graves of soldiers from the National Armed Forces serving in Capt. Henryk Flame's "Bartek" unit, who had been vanquished in 1946. On the basis of the analysis of archive materials and witness evidence it was possible to establish that a group of about thirty people (approximately one third of the unit) was transported to the area of a former Luftwaffe airport in Stary Grodków and accommodated in a mined barracks that was blown up. The first traces of mass murder were already identified during work with using a metal detector involving military engineers (photograph 5) – a gorget with the image of the Mother of God against the background of a crowned eagle presented clear evidence of soldiers from Capt. Flame's unit².



Photograph 5: Research carried out with the use of a metal detector within the designated sectors, Stary Grodków, Poland

^{2/} The area designated for work was checked for dangerous materials lying in the ground.

Surveys carried out on small areas confirmed the remains of a provisional barracks showing traces of an explosion in the selected area (photograph 6).

Removal with an excavator of a layer of humus on an area of about five acres in the vicinity revealed outlines of mass graves, placed in craters resulting from mortar fire as well as a ditch. (photographs 7 A and 7 B)



Photograph 6: Setting a survey excavation, Stary Grodków, Poland



Photograph 7 A: Mass grave, Stary Grodków, Poland



Photograph 7 B: Exhumation from a mass grave, Stary Grodków, Poland

Human remains found in the graves were documented according to the methodology used by archaeologists marking and photographing them *in situ* with a forensic pathologist present during the entire procedure. Personal belongings of the victims found in the grave were secured and submitted to conservation experts. Here, as in other cases, the next stage of work consisted of an anthropological analysis in a mobile laboratory detailed examination and medical and judicial expertise, in accordance with the principles of medical, legal and forensic expertise, and, finally, DNA tests. (photographs 8 and 9)

The knowledge and methodology of conducting research developed by experts from Poland have already become interesting for other countries with a totalitarian past, as for example Georgia. In May 2015, at the invitation of the Georgian non-governmental organisation Soviet Past Research Laboratory (SovLab) and DVV International, three employees of the Investigative Department of the IPN (Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, Ph.D., Justyna Sawicka and Michał Nowak) together with two members of the Forensic Department of Wrocław Medical University (Łukasz Szleszkowski, M.D., Ph.D., and Agata Thannhäuser) participated in the *Soviet Era Mass Graves*



Photograph 8: Mobile laboratory, Rzeszów, Poland



Photograph 9: Exhumation of human remains from a mass grave in Rzeszów, Poland. Each skeleton is exhumed separately

in Georgia research project. In Georgia, the search for victims of the Red Terror (1937-1939) as well as the Georgian Uprising of 1924 is still at the archival research stage. During a visit lasting several days, experiences collected during the projects conducted in Poland were shared and the directions for conducting archival research and historical queries discussed and set. Archive material and evidence given by eyewitnesses focussing on three areas was examined. Preliminary exploration work, examinations and surface surveys were initiated on two of these areas – one on the grounds of a former artillery barracks of the 1st shooting range for cadets in Tbilisi (Saburtalo, Vake), the other on the grounds of the farm of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in the Soghanlugh valley – were conducted in coordination with the chief-investigator of the Georgian project, Irakli Khvadagiani. In one of the selected places (Vake), research by ground-penetrating radar (GPR) was conducted and drillings were made in the place where an anomaly in the soil structure had been identified. No human bones (nor traces of human activity, except for its upper layer) were found in the ground explored – but it must be said that was some

of the first archaeological work aimed at identifying mass graves from the 1920s and 1930s in Georgia. The scale of difficulty in conducting this type of research differs from country to country, yet researchers within the field agree that all efforts to find graves hidden for decades and restoring the names of the victims is an important and necessary task.

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Exhumations of the remains of the victims of post-war repressions in Poland

The article describes the history of the anti-Soviet underground in Poland after the Second World War and the search for the graves of those members of the underground movement who had been killed and secretly buried by state authorities. Following the Second World War in Poland, in response to rampant terror, a movement called the anti-communist underground arose, opposing the new USSR-dependent government. The NKVD, SMERSH, and the Department of Security fought all forms of resistance. Individuals associated with the underground were most often sentenced to death and their bodies concealed in anonymous graves. Only after the political transformation in Poland during the 1990s has the search for these unknown burial places become possible. Research conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance is enabling the discovery of these graves, the identification of the remains, and proper burial of the victims many years after their deaths.

The year 1945 in Europe – although it marked the end of World War II – did not mark the end of the struggle for independence and the beginning of longed-for peace for some countries. In many Eastern European countries (such as Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, and Poland) yet another tragic period of conspiratorial activity and fighting began, this time with the threat coming from the East. Along with the encroaching troops of the Red Army, NKVD and SMERSH, military counterintelligence units began operations on Polish territory¹. Military and political formations subordinated to the lawful government-in-exile in London opposed the installation of a new, entirely USSR-dependent government in Poland. Distrust of the changes coming from the East was compounded by public memories of the Soviet aggression against Poland on 17 September 1939, the mass deportations of the population and the Katyn Massacre². After the war, Polish pro-independence organisations continued the conspiratorial and military activities they had started under Nazi occupation. The largest organisations were those emerging from the *Home Army* (abbreviated in Polish as AK) as the largest resistance movement in occupied Poland, such as: Resistance Movement without War and Sabotage – Freedom and Independence, National Armed Forces, National Military Union, and Conspiratorial Polish Army (Poleszak & Wnuk 2007). All forms of opposition against the new Moscow-backed Polish government were vigorously persecuted by Soviet authorities. Both the NKVD and SMERSH targeted underground military organisations, whose operations were effectively detected and terminated. Immediately after the war, members of these organisations were arrested, placed in camps, deported to the Soviet Union or sentenced to death in arbitrary court-martials. The greatest single campaign of elimination – the so-called Augustów roundup during which about 600 individuals disappeared – was carried out in 1945. In view of the growing repression in Poland, a movement called the Polish post-war anti-communist underground arose. After many years these soldiers were called *Żołnierze*

1/ NKVD is the Russian abbreviation for Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs which formed the law enforcement and secret service agency of the ruling Communist party in the USSR from 1934-1946. In 1946, the agency was merged with the secret police (NKGB) to form the Ministry for Internal Affairs (MVD) and Ministry of State Security (MGB). Following another restructuring, the Committee for State Security (KGB) formed the main security agency of the USSR from 1954-1991. SMERSH (allegedly a Russian acronym for Death to Spies) formed the counter espionage agency of the USSR from 1943-1946.

2/ The Katyn Massacre is named after the forest of Katyn in Poland, where the corpses of approx. 22,000 Polish officers had been buried after being shot by the NKVD under a covert operation in April and May 1940. German troops located the graves and exhumed the remains in 1943 to use them for propaganda purposes.

Wyklęci [accursed soldiers] or *Żołnierze Niezłomni* [unyielding soldiers]. Initially, the forest partisan groups were of a military character, targeting units of the Red Army, the NKVD and the domestic security apparatus (Security Office), or special Polish military units (such as KBW, forming the Polish abbreviation for Internal Security Corps) engaged in the elimination of the so-called “bands”, as partisan units were referred to. The objectives of the forest groups also included maintenance of combat readiness for the expected conflict between Western Europe and the USSR (World War III). The years 1952-53 saw the elimination of the last partisan units, whose activities at that time were essentially limited to survival and avoidance of the growing number of raids carried out by the KBW. The last of these units consisted of seven partisans and was eliminated by a branch of the Internal Security Corps consisting of around 1300 (!) soldiers. From then on, the forests now concealed only lone single soldiers. The last of the Polish “accursed soldiers” (Józef Franczak alias Lalek) was shot dead in an ambush on 21 October 1963 – 18 years after the end of the war.

Individuals associated with the pro-independence movement were usually sent in front of firing squads by the military during the post-war period. Approximately 4000 individuals were executed during the years 1944-56 in this way.

Among the “accursed soldiers”, the most prominent one was Captain Witold Pilecki who was executed in Warsaw in 1948 for pro-independence activities. Associated with underground activities during the Nazi occupation, he was the only person to deliberately have himself arrested in order to penetrate the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. He stayed over two years in the camp and wrote several reports describing the Holocaust after his escape. Other well-known figures included General August Fieldorf (alias Nil [Nile]), Major Hieronim Dekutowski (alias Zapora [Dam]) and Major Zygmunt Szendzielarz (alias Łupaszka). However, a special place among the victims is held by a 17-year-old nurse from a partisan unit named Danuta Siedzikówna (alias *Inka*), whose grave was discovered in September 2014 in a cemetery in Gdańsk. It is known from historical records that she provided assistance to partisans and wounded enemies alike during her unit’s military actions. She was arrested in 1946 and – despite being brutally interrogated – never disclosed the location where her unit was stationed. She was sentenced to death by firing squad and killed in prison in Gdańsk. From the testimony of a chaplain who witnessed the execution, it is known that she yelled “Long live Poland!” in front of the firing squad. None of the soldiers dared to fire at her, all of them aiming at another convict standing beside her. She was ultimately killed by a shot to the head by the commander of the firing squad.

Her story, like those of the other “accursed soldiers”, was forgotten for more than 50 years. During the period of the Polish Peoples Republic (1952-1989) the partisans were portrayed as common bandits; only after the political transformation in 1989 and the following opening of archives did the opportunity arise to conduct a multidirectional study of this difficult period in Poland’s post-war history. However, the issue of the “accursed soldiers” did not enter public discourse until much later. On 1 March 2011, the National Day of Remembrance of the Accursed Soldiers was established. As a consequence, the issue received media attention and became a subject of history lessons in school, publications (including graphic novels) and various forms of commemoration (monuments, plaques, the naming of schools, road rallies, concerts) as well as national ceremonies. This subject has become particularly important for young people, who have begun to find role models in figures like *Inka*, admiring her character and steadfast nature. Due to the great interest by young people, the “accursed soldiers” have also entered popular culture. In recent years, clothing (such as sweatshirts and T-shirts) bearing motifs referring to the soldiers has become very popular.

There are even companies operating in the market producing so-called patriotic clothing while films, music, murals and board games related to the issue have appeared. In schools, young people prepare various



Figure 1

Source: Stanisław Szleszkowski

projects on this subject (figure 1). Original partisan songs from the 40s and 50s survived to reappear in contemporary rock arrangements.

The “accursed soldiers” are nowadays first and foremost associated with one very important issue. After the death sentences were carried out, most of them were buried in unknown locations administered by the security service throughout the country, often in mass graves. Families of victims were not informed about the burial site, sometimes not even about the victim’s arrest or execution. Today, most of them are still waiting for the discovery of the remains of their relatives – brothers, fathers, grandfathers.

The opening of the archives after 1989, following the political transformation in Poland, created an opportunity to find the graves and to restore the identities of the victims.

Exploration work both in the archives and in the field is now conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance and was initiated by Professor Krzysztof Szwagrzyk over 15 years ago. Field studies have been preceded by a detailed study of the archives (Szwagrzyk et al. 2013 and 2016). The first exhumations were conducted in the years 2003-08 while the first mass exhumation of plots associated with prisons was carried out in 2011-12 at the Osobowicki Cemetery in Wrocław. The next campaign, conducted in 2012-13, was the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw, the place where the most important figures of the post-war anti-communist underground had been buried. To date, as a result of work carried out throughout Poland, the team led by Professor Szwagrzyk has found the remains of about 700 prisoners from the period 1944-56. Most of them have been located in cemeteries, where killed prisoners were buried in separate areas. In some of them, the prisoners were laid in coffins and buried in individual graves with the procedure being recorded in the records of the cemetery. In other places bodies were placed in mass graves without coffins or personal items, in random positions, and with no burial rituals (photograph 2). Such burials have not been documented in the records of the cemeteries. As a matter of fact, the circumstances of the burials did not qualify the resulting graves as regular burial sites typical for cemeteries but rather as places to hide bodies. The lack of documents and particularities of the burial sites necessitated regular prosecutorial, forensic and medico-legal procedures in the course of exploration and research. To complicate matters, new graves have often been created with the aim of covering the traces of the mass burials in such cemeteries. Almost symbolically, the graves of the killers (judges, prosecutors, executioners) are often placed atop the graves of the victims. This is the case in Warsaw, where the graves of about 100 prisoners have been covered with later graves.



Photograph 2

Source: Lukasz Szleszkowski

Following the discovery of the graves, archaeological and photographic documentation is made. The remains are studied in detail by a forensic anthropologist and a forensic pathologist, most often in a field examining laboratory erected at the excavation site (photograph 3). Individual bones are placed in anatomical order in the examining lab; researchers make detailed records of their inspections and material is collected for genetic testing. Sex, age and height at death are measured and determined, resulting in a biological profile of the remains. All individual features of identification are described in detail. This includes the condition of the teeth (cavities, dental crowns), possible fractures, congenital lesions and bone diseases (Kawecki et al. 2014). In many cases, the team has access to certain data of prisoners as for example general dental information. This enables identity profiling prior to genetic research, which represents the final phase of personal identification. An important tool in the initial identification is the comparison of the sequence of burials with data from the cemetery documentation (if such documentation exists). However, experience taught us



Photograph 3

Source: Łukasz Szleszkowski

that every site has its own specific characteristics and requires an individual research method.

From a forensic physician's point of view, the most interesting aspect of the procedure is formed by the forensic medical research, consisting of an analysis of injuries and drawing conclusions concerning the cause of death and mechanism of injuries.

Part of the research carried out during exploration and exhumation is the analysis of shooting as a method of execution in Poland in the 1940s and 50s.

These studies are of a unique and pioneering nature, since no similar work on this scale has been carried out previously in Poland. Despite the existence of legal regulations regarding methods of shooting involving a firing squad, the way sentences were carried out differed in most cases from what we understand by the term shooting. Only a few of the examined cases of execution could have been carried out by firing squads equipped with automatic weapons such as the Soviet submachine guns

PPSh and PPS. (Jureket al. 2014). Most cases represent a single gunshot from a handgun with a calibre of 7.62 mm, aimed at the back of the head (photograph 4) (Szleszkowski et al. 2015). The nature of the ascertained wounds shows a unique concurrence with the results of work carried out at the sites of execution of Polish officers in Katyn, Mednoye, and Kharkov (Baran et al. 1993, Baran et al. 1993a, Baran 1998). In the vicinity of these places, in 1940, the NKVD killed more than 10,000 Polish prisoners of war held in camps in Kozelsk, Ostashkov and Starobelsk. In the case of victims of the post-war repression, the ritual of executing by a firing squad was abandoned in favour of a method inconsistent with the gravity of a court sentence. A shot in the back of the head at close range was a very effective method; it did not involve a large number of people in executions, and was a proven method of eliminating human beings.



Photograph 4
Source: Łukasz Szleszkowski

Post-war authorities in Poland denied the victims sentenced to death and their families a basic right belonging to every human being: the right to a dignified burial. Only now, 70 years after these events, thanks to the work of a multidisciplinary team, has the discovery, identification and return to the families of these remains of their loved ones along with their proper re-burial been made possible.

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Mikhail Rozhanskiy

From *The Mystery of Kilometre 10* to *The Moon King's Cottage*

Simulacra in discussions of the Great Terror

In his article, Mikail Rojinski provides a case-study on the search for a Soviet-era mass grave in Irkutsk, Russia. By combining a description of the activities initiated under this search – since 1988, on a local level, with a close reading of relevant documents (mostly letters) from the 1930s – the author intriguingly manages to show how history, memory, discourse and particularly topography interact at a specific place. And as the author points out, the history of this place does not come to an end with the discovery of the grave but keeps on developing into the future.

1988 – The Mystery of Kilometre 10

The issue of the Great Terror became relevant for the Irkutsk newspapers in connection with searches for a place of mass executions and burials. In the summer of 1988, a small group of “informal activists” (mainly those supporting the political left) investigated an area located 10 kilometres from the Yakutsk Motorway, where, as it had been rumoured since at least the 1960s, people had been shot in the late 1930s. The explorations were aimed at finding some evidence of the area having been used as a place for executions and a mass grave. The activist group carried out its activities in an active political period in Irkutsk that caused clashes between different informal groups and *proto-parties* of different ideologies and political views, when each group tried to shape an agenda and to demonstrate their not only polemical but also practical activity. Therefore the first findings – revolver cartridges, dents on a concrete wall that prevented the ground being seen from the motorway – were publicly declared as evidence proving that the ground had been used for mass executions. Remnants of some local structures were also interpreted respectively: the concrete wall was perceived as the place of individual executions, a part of a locomotive furnace as the incinerator for the dead bodies, etc. The explorers called themselves The Wall Group, and they attracted attention to Kilometre 10, speaking at different rallies that were held in the city for different reasons in those months. A former shooting ground became an actively visited place where people brought flowers and drew mournful graffiti. Names of those repressed in the 1930s were written on the concrete wall. Following the rallies, local newspapers actively argued over the topic and some demanded that the place be turned into a memorial. Other journalists felt there was not sufficient evidence for that very place, but because of the actual task of refreshing the memory of the repressions and the settled myths about Kilometre 10, the authors considered any doubts only as temporary, so they tried to see some evidence in every detail when describing the concrete wall and the adjacent ground:

“There are remnants of a metal skeleton coming up from the ground several meters from there... apparently it once supported the furnace pipe.”¹

When studying the myth-creating techniques in the content of the then ideological struggle, one can easily identify attempts to avoid the truth:

1/ Воронина Н. Красные цветы на бетонной стене//Советская молодежь, 1988, 27 сентября (№ 115).

“A warning saying ‘Dangerous Zone. Cable... Digging prohibited’ has recently appeared several steps from the wall, above a freshly formed hillock of earth”².

The commemoration of Kilometre 10 coincided – in time – with the establishment of the Memorial Society in Irkutsk, and stimulated its creation. Construction of a memorial for the victims of the repressions became the first priority for the Society’s Organisational Committee. Yet, unlike The Wall Group, the Committee’s participants tried to find incontestable evidence to identify the mass grave. In the meanwhile, the *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda* and *Sovetskaya Molodiezhh’* newspapers in Irkutsk received letters triggered by the publications about Kilometre 10. Together with the newspaper publications, the letters, most of which were not and could not be published due to their number and volume, have been used as key references for this report. They may be subdivided into several groups:

1. letters, in which authors emotionally supported the initiative of commemorating the victims and the memory of the repressions;
2. letters whose authors believed that the journalists had rashly placed the issue of Kilometre 10 in the focus of the public attention;
3. letters whose authors shared their own ideas about potential places linked to the repression machine and referred to some available evidence, either condemning the evidence about Kilometre 10 as a place of executions and burials as unconvincing, or giving some proof of the place having been used for other purposes. In other words, authors of this group of letters did not investigate the topic of repressions but tried to help identify a place for the future memorial.

Let’s have a closer look at the second and third group of the letters. We would like to learn about a spectrum of motives that inspired the authors to enter into the discussion around the commemoration of the repressions in Irkutsk. To clarify the content of the letters and to try to understand the motives behind them, it is necessary to consider the correspondence in the context of the total mass of letters about history that magazines and newspapers received in 1988-1989.

2/ Ibid.

Letter Archives

Archives of letters about history (2 thousand entries) were collected by young historians from Irkutsk in 1989³. Most of the letters were never published because of their number and volume, and those published, as a rule, were strongly abridged and sometimes edited. The flow of letters started to come in spring 1988 when newspapers and magazines first published articles about “grey areas in history”, i.e. topics that had been brought up before the policy of *glasnost*. The articles and letters from the readers focused on the crimes of Stalinism, collectivisation, and the truth about the war. Later on, starting from mid-1989, i.e. before the First Congress of the People’s Deputies, the focus shifted towards characteristics of the Soviet period in history and the Soviet government. The limits on the “permissible” were not only widened but totally lifted, and there were no longer any taboo topics left⁴. Letters with radical evaluations of Soviet history, socialism, the communist idea, etc., stood out from the correspondence that came to the editorial offices. The readers’ feedback on the publication about Kilometre 10 came in autumn 1988 when discussions about Soviet history were already ongoing, yet were limited to separate historical periods, figures and episodes rather than the Soviet era in general. Correspondence that came to *Sovetskaya Molodezh’* became a key element of the discussions about Stalinist repressions highlighted by the newspaper because the editors had participated in the establishment of the Memorial Society. There were yet no letters giving a radically negative evaluation of the Soviet epoch, but there were messages warning about the potential harm and threat of excessive attention to episodes of the Soviet past.

1988 – Letters about Kilometre 10

Authors willing to stop the discussion over *The Mystery of Kilometre 10*⁵ were not necessarily supporters of Stalinism nor denied the fact of the repressions. I quote a letter (somewhat abridged) that was published in the newspaper, but never cited, presumably due to the tone in which it was written:

3/ See Боярских Е.Г., Иванова Е.Н., Кальянова Т.П., Карнаухов С.Г., Рожанский М.Я., Шмидт С.Ф. Письма об истории, письма для истории/ под общей редакцией М.Я. Рожанского. – Иркутск: ЦНСИО, 2014 г.

4/ The last taboo on adverse evaluation of Lenin’s personality and activities was broken by publications at the end of 1989.

5/ That was how A. Semenov, journalist of the oblast newspaper, entitled his article; *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda*, 1988, October 18 (issue 240).

“Does A. Semenov think that people at that time were much more stupid than he is? One should not build any mystery over the facility, especially in the atomic era and of the scientific and technical revolution, because it is as easy as ABC to identify when the structure was built ...

... It is not necessary to make guesses about the mystery of Kilometre 10 and to cause a sensation.

As for the execution of sentences, there was sufficient space for that in the internal prison of the Cheka, later the NKGB, that was situated in Litvinov Street, in the depth of their yard, and from there the dead bodies were taken away by vehicles, but where??...

Most probably, to a specially dedicated place. Those were such times, and it's not up to us to judge or cause a sensation about some open place where Stalinists dealt with their victims. It's our pain, our shame and the shame of those who provoked, calumniated, squealed, i.e. slandered innocent people exposing them to death.

This should never happen again.

At the moment, it is not what matters. Conclusions have been drawn where appropriate, and the period and the leadership have been evaluated in principle.

And I would recommend that comrade Semenov should start doing the work that *perestroika* needs him to do as a reporter. It does need transparency but not the transparency as Semenov understands it, collecting rumours from old ladies and turning them into newspaper gossip.

With respect,

War veteran (signature)^{6/}.

This letter shows the contrast between two closely interlinked features of the readers' letters in the era of *glasnost*. The first is blaming some antagonists (here and most frequently, “the Stalinists”) for the negative aspects of Soviet history. The second is the tone of the social didactics, i.e. resolute evaluation of the ongoing events from the perspective of history, the state, ideology, and handling the person (in this case to the author of the article) as an object of cultivation. It is typical that the letter itself is addressed not to the author of the article but to the editor and the editor's office, i.e. to an institution, and is stylistically a hybrid of a statement and a letter^{7/}.

6/ The letter was written on October 24 1988.

7/ The tone of the social didactics is also typical for the newspaper; e.g., in their response to the above letter the newspaper wrote: “The editors in general agree with your version of the story about Kilometre 10. But you should have presented it in a more peaceful manner and with greater respect to the staff of our newspaper.”

Another instance of feedback, by an honourable pensioner, an ex-worker of the factory that had its testing ground at Kilometre 10, was shaped as a statement addressed to the editor. In his letter he asked for measures to “stop the pilgrimage” to “the wall”. For that purpose, he proposed to immediately install a memorial plaque indicating that the place used to be a factory ground. The author was concerned that the articles published in the newspaper “would be negatively interpreted and even become triggers” in the future. He did not specify what they would actually trigger, but it was clear from the text that it was the excessive attention to the issue of executions and the pilgrimage to the commemorated place. It is only a secondary argument for the author that it is “historically unjustified”, i.e. that Kilometre 10 was not a place of executions. Similarly to the letter cited previously, this one demonstrates firm confidence in the need to control people’s views in order to make them appropriately understand the purposes.

The author of the letter did not express any “Stalinist” views; he did not give any evaluation of the repressions nor deny the fact of the Purge. Similar to the war veteran’s letter above, his motive for getting involved in the discussions was his concern with the excessive attention to the topic. But what was behind the concern?

Vitaly Korotich, editor-in-chief of *Ogoniok* magazine, referred to correspondence about history that the magazine received as “letters of pain”, meaning that most of the authors wrote about their family tragedies and their traumatic experience. Letters stored in our archives confirm this definition, yet they also permit identification of “letters of pain” of another kind, whose tone and content is dictated not by a trauma already experienced but by an ongoing or expected one. These are messages from readers who were traumatised by the actual process of revisiting history and by presentiment of its social consequences. Authors of the letters cited above shaped the presentiment in didactic formula and imperative proposals, yet many other letters just sounded anxious in their tone.

Evidently, there were reasons for concern. Here is an obvious example: *Sovietskaya Molodezh'* newspaper published the notes of an ex-officer of the NKVD, Aleksandr Litvintsev, that were presented by the author as diary notes (undated) of The Great Terror era. It was clear from the editors' introductory remarks that the author retained the right to either name or refrain from naming people involved in the repressions: “The author has changed the names of those characters involved in the events whose fate

is not known to A. Litvintsev, also of those who later atoned for their fault by their heroic struggle against fascism”⁸.

The issue of naming those who worked for the repressive machine was articulated more often than others in discussions about the repressions, and led to uncompromising controversy. According to the report about the first regional conference of the Memorial Society, the issue triggered emotional statements at the conference. The following quotes reflect the polar viewpoints:

“We need to name who is who, otherwise we won’t have a true history.”

“At that time most people had no choice, that was how Stalin’s system worked. So it’s the system we need to fight against”⁹.

In my opinion, the context helps us to understand why commemoration of places of mass repressions turned out to be closely linked to mythologisation. Firstly, to officially recognise a place as a memorial of the repressions that had been already perceived as such could mean a moral and ideological victory in the public controversy, where consensus seemed impossible. Secondly, the struggle for and against the myths was the least traumatising way to refresh the topic of The Great Terror.

1988 – Letters about the Moon King’s Cottage

The story of Kilometre 10 looked less and less convincing: no new evidence was found, and readers’ letters confirmed that the area had been used as a testing ground by a heavy engineering factory. A decisive role in the search for mass graves was played by a big group of letters whose authors disagreed with the Kilometre 10 version and suggested some other places for the search, supporting that by some facts available to them. Here is an anonymous letter to *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda*:

“In order to confirm that the area located down the hill, in the forest away from the Yuakutsk motorway was once used for testing cannonballs manufactured by the Kuybyshev Factory in 1938-40, it is necessary to study the files of the factory’s outpatient clinic for the period when it was headed by Dr. Kozmina. The outpatient clinic sent their medical assistant¹⁰ – whose name I cannot recall – to the testing ground... Was it Tarnovskaya? She said she was blindfolded after they left the city. Yet people

8/ «Я, Александр Литвинцев, свидетельствую...»//Советская молодежь, 1988, №124.

9/ Сухаревская Любовь, Предать забвению – больше, чем предать...//Советская молодежь, 1989, 26 января (№11).

10/ A doctor’s assistant or a paramedic.

knew about the existence of the ground. They employed deaf-mutes in workshops that worked for the defence industry... .

... You wrote that P. N. Shibanova suggested there was a mass grave in Nesterov Street. But the Snamenskoye Cemetery used to be there, so some bullet-holed skulls found there result from the burials of those shot and those killed with sabres after the December events¹¹. There are plates that were thrown down from the cemetery scattered all over the slope of the hill. Comrade Romanov had a shrewd idea that the shootings were carried out close to the Wheat Gully. The NKVD files should include information about those killed. And there must have been a prison cemetery where they buried those who died during the typhus epidemic. They could not take people over a long distance to kill them, so gullies on the hills around the city fitted the best, those from the side of the Rabochiy and Znamensky suburbs.”

Authors of the letters who tried to help to identify the places of burials and potentially executions were motivated by reasons radically different from those whose letters were described in the previous chapter. These have no didactic tone, yet some mythological images appear in their letters as well. For instance, the one cited above referred to “blindfolding” and “employed deaf-mutes”¹². Another letter referred to a location close to the village of Pivovarikha:

“In 1959 I had to spend a night in Pivovarikha, and here is what a local resident told me. In 1937-1938 there were two Caucasian men in Pivovarikha (if only those could be called men!) who spent time with women during the day and went to work at nightfall. People who were to be killed were delivered there by prison-vans from the prison, and those two men shot them before daybreak. Shootings were heard throughout the night from the wood located on the outskirts of Pivovarikha. Local people also showed me the place, and it was clear that trenches had been dug and then backfilled there. And after Vlasov, the chief of the regional NKVD was arrested, those two disappeared from Pivovarikha at night”¹³.

And here are another two out of a set of letters that presumably determined the fact that the search for the mass grave finally led to the outskirts of Pivovarikha. The author of the first one shared what his father “saw and heard”:

“He is 83, and he’s lived in Pivovarikha since 1932. There is a long trench near the Moon King Cottage (a summer cottage of the MVD, now

¹¹/ An uprising against Kolchak’s government in Irkutsk in 1919.

¹²/ I don’t refute the facts because I did not check them, but just highlight the mythical logic in these statements.

¹³/ A letter from the town of Svirsk; November 12 1988.

a dog shelter). According to my father, bodies of those shot were brought there by canvas-covered vehicles at night. First they thought it was ammunition but then it became clear that those were dead bodies, i.e. bodies of people who had been executed. My father says there are about ten thousand people buried there. It is supposedly an estimate made by the drivers. Once my father came through the forest from Lisikha where he worked, and he was stopped by a guard who blindfolded him and took him to the road.”

And here is the full text of the second letter:

“Comrade Semenov A.!

I’m writing with regard to your publications about Kilometre 10. From 1937 and up to her retirement my mother worked as a typist at the NKVD-KGB Department of Irkutsk. She told me that for a while after the NKVD employed her, people who were sentenced by *troikas*¹⁴ were executed in the yard of the Department. There used to be (or may be now as well) a one-story building believed to be a storage for administrative goods (seemingly, for some stationary). So the building was used for the executions. The yard was isolated from Litvinov and Uritskov streets by buildings and was fully confined. On execution days the building superintendent walked through rooms whose windows faced the yard and ordered the windows to be curtained off, put on the lights and switch on the loud-speakers. Then some weak claps could be heard from the yard. My mother said she once violated the rules and looked out of the window, and she saw how they loaded dead bodies on a truck, pulling them out from the one-story building. Then the executions in the NKVD yard stopped, and she heard rumours that they had started executing people in the village of Pivovarikha. At that time there was a farm run by the Department that was located in the village, also a pioneer camp and a summer cottage [dacha] of a kindergarten for children of the NKVD Department’s staff. I also spent summers in the cottage in 1942 and 1944. Children always talked about “a lot of dead people” and “walking ghosts” in the Moon King’s Cottage (there was a place called so in Pivovarikha). Sometimes the teachers scared us by telling stories about the Cottage so that we would not run beyond the premises.

I have lived in apartment 9 at 23, Volodarsky street, since 1943. Before 1960 the building belonged by the NKVD-KGB, so people working for the agency lived and are still living there. In the 1950s, after the 20th Con-

¹⁴/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD_troika

gress of the Communist Party, neighbours talked much about the repressions and about those who had been either shot or buried in Pivovarikha.

In the 1960s I worked at the Irkutsk regional prosecutor's office, and I heard from some old employees that people who had been sentenced to "capital measure of social protection" by the regional court or court martial under article 58 of the Criminal Code were shot in prison, and people sentenced by the NKVD's Special Council were executed in the village of Pivovarikha and somewhere else.

I think old residents of Pivovarikha should know something about that.

My name is ... Ar-kiy D. N.

With respect /signature / 3.11.88."

Both letters are apparently motivated by willingness to help to find the truth. The authors bring "firsthand" evidence. Yet both use the popular place name of the Moon King Cottage, apparently of a mythological origin. The authors themselves (as especially evident from the lawyer's letter) tried to stay away from any mythology (unlike most others, they even refrained from citing rumours), yet the name of the Moon King Cottage was some time later taken up by journalists.

1989 – Pivovarikha

The search conducted by the Memorial Society in autumn 1989 led to the outskirts of the Pivovarikha village. *Sovetskaya Molodezh'* named readers' letters as one of the clues that brought the searchers to the location¹⁵. Today (i.e. 27 years since then), a member of the Memorial's Public Council who headed the excavations, a professional archeologist, cannot recall any evidence from the above-cited correspondence. According to him, KGB officers played a key role in identification of the area for the excavations¹⁶. There was no documentary support though, and the KGB officers who participated in the search affirmed no documents had ever been found that would refer to a mass grave¹⁷. Yet they found an ex-driver who was involved in the transportation of dead bodies, and whatever he could recall helped to identify the place for the diggings. The lack of a particular focus on the evidence set out in the correspondence or verbal communi-

¹⁵/ "Every letter was particularly closely studied"//Сухаревская Л. Иркутские Куропаты?//Советская молодежь, 1989, №119.

¹⁶/ A telephone interview with Y. Ineshin, July 2016.

¹⁷/ According to the expert opinion of colleagues from the Department's Archives, the documents were "cleaned up" in the 1950s.

cations to the newspaper or to the Memorial's Organisational Committee was also indirectly confirmed by the fact that excavations near Pivovarikha started only after unsuccessful diggings elsewhere at locations that had never or rarely been mentioned in the letters.

The diggings near Pivovarikha found a mass grave in September 1989, and discovered that the place had been used not only for burials but also for killings, since people buried in the trench appeared to have personal belongings: there was a briefcase, remnants of purses, warm clothes, and even a pillow.

Crushed faces, fractured skulls, impacts of blunt objects also suggested that those who survived the shootings were finally killed with the butts of rifles.

The regional prosecutor's office initiated criminal proceedings, the local administration provided vehicles and equipment for the diggings, and trainees from the Police Academy were involved in the physical work. Three trenches were discovered that had been blasted and used as collectors. In October, the Irkutsk administration made a decision to create a Purge Victims Memorial at the site. Diggings continued until the frost arrived, and remnants of 402 bodies were removed from one of the trenches, though their identification was impossible. Estimates of the total number of the buried bodies vary between those identified in newspapers in 1989 and those named by specialist involved in the diggings, and range from 7 to 15 thousand¹⁸.

In their issues dated November 7 (i.e. dedicated to the anniversary of the October Revolution, one of the main official holidays of that time), local newspapers, *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda* (a small announcement on the last page, below articles dedicated to the holiday) and *Sovetskaya Molodezh'* (in a black-framed column on the front page) announced the opening of the Memorial Cemetery on November 11 and the reburial of the bodies exhumed during the investigation. The ceremony started in Irkutsk, where mourning that would take place for several hours was announced, and then the ceremony participants moved to the buses. The memorial at the trenches included a Mourning Wall built with plastered concrete plates and covered with photos and names of the victims; a monument at the entrance to the area consisting of two granite blocks placed on one another

¹⁸/An Irkutsk newspaper *SM Nomer Odin* cited criminal law expert N. Erastov: "By very rough estimates, up to 15 thousand executed people were buried in the surroundings of Pivovarikha" («Пивовариха и Киренск»//СМ Номер один, May 12 2005. См: <http://baikal-info.ru/sm/2005/18/006007.html>). In his interview, archeologist E. Ineshin estimated the number as "approximately seven thousand, no more" (July 2016). All the numbers specified by mass media in the recent 25 years fall within this range.

and inscribed: “Remember, Homeland, all the innocent people who were killed. Show mercy and rescue us from obscurity”; a three-meter-high Orthodox cross next to the monument; and a separate granite block at the edge of the site reading “To your memory and hearts we appeal, people. Don’t let our fate become yours.”

The memorial was created in autumn 1989, in haste, which actually turned out to be justified. For instance, in Tomsk, where a mass grave was also found in the late 1980s, the case was never brought to indisputable identification and memorialisation. Hence the development and use of the area for landfill, which ruled out any chances for diggings¹⁹.

In 1997 the Governor of the Irkutsk Region confirmed the status of the local historical monument to the memorial created near Pivovarikha and thus placed it under state protection.

2011 – The Moon King Cottage

Most of publications about the memorial near Pivovarikha in the 25 years since its establishment have been operating with the Moon King Cottage formula. It was first used by local newspapers in spring 1990, i.e. several months after the opening of the memorial and the mourning ceremony. Though the Moon King Cottage is only adjacent to the mass grave and not part of the memorial, publications often start with retelling the legend explaining the place name (in the 1870s-80s, the house was rented by an exile Pole who had some eye disease and went outdoors only at night). Sometimes authors don’t even mention the legend, assuming the myth is sufficiently known and accepted as a marker of the memorial site. The creation of myths was not only limited to that: rumours about ghosts and other paranormal phenomena also arose with time. The vicinity of the mass grave to the local airport was even used as a version explaining the frequency of plane crashes. In September 2009, exactly 20 years after the digging of the mass grave, “an independent research group” called *Irkutsk Kosmopoisk* examined the area “to find evidence of anomalies”²⁰. The group’s report referred to the memorial site as “the premises of the Moon King Cottage”. The team did not find any evidence or proof of anomalies, and the report authors admitted that the paranormal phenomena could be only seeming or farfetched, because “one does not need to be a spiritualist to feel distressed, psychologically uncomfortable and potentially

¹⁹/ See, for instance <http://www.svoboda.mobi/a/27803161.html>

²⁰/ http://kosmopoisk.org/articles/reports/otchyot_po_issledovaniyu_rayona_dachi_lunnogo_korolya_irkutskaya_oblast_1617.html

depressed” there²¹. Yet the report still conceded that the zone might have been anomalous. In 2015, the group leader confidently included the Moon King Cottage in the *Irkutsk Anomalies Guide* published by a popular internet-media outlet in Irkutsk²². The confidence was based on some evidence and a vague new moon video shot by the group in 2012.

In 2014-2015, the memorial was back in focus because of conflicts resulting from the fact that the boundaries of the site had not been precisely identified and marked. Many times, either a conflict gave rise to rumours or a rumour provoked a conflict. Two of the most prominent conflicts included a protest against construction of a cottage village on the premises of the Moon King Cottage and response to rumours about planned reconstruction of the airport runway using some part of the memorial site.

The conflicts revealed several new circumstances to the broad public:

- the memorial area had no official owner, as the public organisation who had had a general tenancy for the land either no longer existed or had no official documents;
- the memorial needed serious rehabilitation, because in the early 2000s the metal chains that fenced-in the grave were cut and stolen, and in 2010 a fire damaged the Mourning Wall; in addition, relatives of the repressed independently and haphazardly installed and hung signs in memory of their ancestors;
- over the twenty five years, no money had ever been allocated for identifying and marking the precise boundaries of the graves or even for the protection of the memorial (and there had been some acts of vandalism).

As a result, there was no boundary between the area of economic activities and the memorial (the mourning space) either on land or in people's minds. People arranged spontaneous landfills close to the memorial, and the local administration tried to counter those attempts but could not stop them fully. The territory of the Moon King Cottage was registered as a development area for construction of cottages and became an “enclave” within the wider burial site because in the 1930s-40s the area was used for recreation (as a boarding house and a pioneer camp for the NKVD staff) and for farming activities. Yet the possibility of some graves still remaining in the “enclave” could not be ruled out, as the boundaries of the forest around had changed. There are steady rumours about tortures

²¹/Ibid.

²²/<https://ircity.ru/articles/7379/>

and executions on the premises of the “Cottage” itself²³, so the planned construction of summer cottages is perceived as sacrilege by those who think that the “NKVD farm” is a part of the commemorated area. Those for whom the issue is still highly traumatic vehemently react to any events that may be interpreted as encroachment on the memorial, and interpret them exactly as such.

The uncertainty of the memorial boundaries, lack of an institution in charge of its condition and fate, create a situation provoking gossip and emotional conflicts. Mythological elements of the commemoration are recalled and new ones arise, and since these crosscut issue of the Great Terror, they turn into simulacra of the memorial’s meaning, a kind of an emotional camouflage for suspending the handling of the historical trauma still not coped with. A role is also played by the fact that the memorial is located in the geographic periphery of the city. Discovery of the purge victims’ graves near Pivovarikha and creation of the memorial there were an important step towards refreshing the topic of the Great Terror and articulating “the 1937 trauma”. But the issue has not actually been commemorated within the city space of Irkutsk itself. The topic of repressions is missing in regional and city history museums, though ex-victims of the Purge arranged their meetings at the City History Museum. Buildings in the centre of Irkutsk that once belonged to the NKVD are now occupied by the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) and the Federal Security Service (FSB). The prison functions as a pretrial detention centre. There are no memorial plaques. The *Last Address* campaign was only initiated in June 2016, and if continued, it would permit tracking the commemoration of the topic in the contemporary city of Irkutsk as handling the historical trauma. Yet today we can say that for 25 years already, people have been escaping the trauma, and the creation of the myths is an indicator of the escape.

Instead of an Epilogue

July 2016 – Kilometre 10

In mid-July a post illustrated with photos was published on a Facebook page dedicated to the Irkutsk oblast and started with the words “Today

²³/ “Old residents say people were shot on the summer cottage premises, and ten years ago nobody would want to live there” (Трифоновна Елена Мёртвым грузом: Границы мемориала в Пивоварихе могут быть изменены // Губерния, November 25 2014
См: <http://www.vsp.ru/social/2014/11/25/549009>

we hear the echo of the year 1937”²⁴. The author of the post, a female TV journalist from Irkutsk, too young to have witnessed the debate about *The Mystery of Kilometre 10*, actually wrote about *The Mystery of Kilometre 12*. Photos undoubtedly show the same wall that triggered the search for the place of mass executions and burials in 1988 and that later turned out to be a concrete cover at the munitions factory testing ground. The journalist sees the wall as “apparently a shooting wall”, because “there are bullet holes, names and dates of executions” and “there is a path leading to the wall, and there are flowers at the foot – so descendants of those who were killed there are still alive.” The author appealed to those “who know more about the place and the events that happened there” to write about that. In response to the request, somebody posted a copy of an old article *The End of the Mystery of the Tenth Kilometre* in comments. The journalist thanked the commenter for the “version”, but a controversy in the comments followed, mainly between a commenter who said she was happy that “another version about the bloody KGB” had failed, and a famous Irkutsk art photographer who categorically insisted that the “tenth kilometre” was a special place equipped for executions:

“The 20-man-wide wall is pocked with bullet holes... There is an underground crematorium within 20 steps from the wall, with concrete steps and a slope for dragging the dead bodies. The incinerator pipe is put above the trees so that it would draw well, which is a clear sign of a crematorium and not a firing ground.”

The art photographer augmented his position by saying that he “had seen everything with his eyes of an experienced photographer” even three months before the article about the *The Mystery of Kilometre 10* was written by a journalist who used to be a trainer at the regional committee of the Communist Party. People whose testimony the journalist referred to in 1989 also, according to the art photographer, were “old fighters of the Communist Party”.

In other words, the photographer said that the focus was intentionally diverted from the “tenth kilometre” in the 1980s. While he saw the evil intent in the past, his opponent used present malice as the main argument:

“I don’t deny the facts of shootings in the period of the repressions. But it so happens that some people continue dramatising this issue for purposes that are far from sincere sympathy to the repression victims.”

²⁴/ See: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/650368228331988/permalink/1051838328184974/>

In the course of the controversy, the author of the above not only wrote about some evil purposes but she also made hints about those “who stood behind that”.

The post had dozens of reposts, and one was preceded with the following:

“One more DEATH GROUND for political repressions found. People should demand that the Regional Prosecution Service and the FSB would conduct investigation for this DEATH factory.”

Without getting back to the 1989 discussions or trying to understand if there was any reason to connect Kilometre 10 with the year 1937, I would like to wrap up by referring to the 2016 controversy. More specifically, to the search for the enemy’s malicious intent, accompanied by the tone of social didactics that the controversy participants used as a means of polemics, regardless of the positions they upheld. The search for the enemy and social didactics in disputes over the repressions show that the historical trauma of “The Great Terror” remains not coped with. Creation of myths does not help to cope with it, but rather substitutes for the coping just as it did twenty-five years ago.

Several days after the controversy started on Facebook, TV news on a regional TV channel showed an episode about the “execution wall”. The author of the episode was the female journalist who had written the post, and the key actor in the episode was the art photographer who was shown, if not as a witness of the shootings, then at least as the one who participated in the discovery of the sinister place of terror in 1980s.

“We found a man who knows the secret of the grey wall:

“I strained my memory to remember how I had received the information, and I recalled: I was informed about that by the Press and News Agency, at that time a subsidiary of the KGB. So I went to see that place. I stopped, and it took me some time to find it as there were no marks. You just go down a high slope, and then the terrible scenery opened”²⁵.

25/ Эхо 37-го. Под Иркутском обнаружили расстрельную стену//Вести-Иркутск, July 17 2016. http://vesti.irk.ru/news/news_day/182660/

Local Memory Initiative in Cambodia

The article describes a project which Youth for Peace (YFP) has developed and implemented since 2007. The project is based on field research conducted in 2005 under the title “Genocide in the Mind of the Cambodian Youth”. The project aims at supporting the activities of the ECCC¹ while promoting dialogues on history and reconciliation efforts. Still, this work is not enough and not sustainable after the ECCC ends. The opportunity to have dialogues on the KR (Khmer Rouge) past may not be as easy as it is now due to the political sensitivity and uncertainty. The questions are: What next after the ECCC? What can we do to sustain the dialogues about the past from generation to generation? To achieve these goals we have to build up a legacy of the past which is meaningful for both – the survivors and future generations. Cambodia constructed memorials and a museum after the collapse of the KR regime. Those memorials (stupas) and the museum were initiated by the state, so those memorials and museum are not the representation of the victims or survivors. There are still many problems regarding those memorials. The skeletons and bones are not maintained well, and some others are exposed to sun and rain and are gradually dissolving. I have also identified that the history of local memorials and mass killing sites are not recorded, documented and compiled, so they will be lost in the near future. Some mass killing sites have been forgotten and abandoned. The people living around the killing sites are not aware of them and do not understand the value of them enough to protect and maintain them. The stories of survivors and heroes are not documented to promote the healing process and understanding about the past.

1/ ECCC: Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia

Introduction

Cambodia used to be a colony under the control of the French; it claimed independence in 1953 as a neutral state with territorial integrity (Shawcross 1986). However, it was torn by violent conflict, atrocity, and civil war inflicted on the country by capitalist and socialist forces, especially through the Vietnam War during the Cold War. The Vietnam War encroached the northeastern and southern parts of the Cambodian border. Cambodia suffered under the secret American war strategy that used massive bombing (by B52 bombers): a million tons of bombs were dropped over northeastern and southern parts of Cambodia along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border (Shawcross 1986). This led to around 300,000 people killed, many more wounded, and thousands of dwellings burned (Khamboly 2007). Due to the bombings and other social and political unrest, many Cambodians ran into the jungle to join the Khmer Rouge resistance to fight against Lon Nol, who was backed by the United States of America. The Khmer Rouge movement, along with the call from Prince Norodom Sihanouk to join the battle against Lon Nol's leadership, eventually provided an opportunity for Pol Pot to come to power in 1975.

A few days after they took power, the Khmer Rouge deported people from Phnom Penh and from other cities so they could undertake agricultural work in the countryside. During the deportation, thousands of people died. The Khmer Rouge thus began to implement their radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist programme to transform Cambodia into a rural society without classes, exploitation, and with no poor and rich (Khamboly 2007).

From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge transformation programme caused the death of nearly two million Cambodians due to disease, lack of medicines and medical services, overwork, execution, starvation, and torture (Khamboly 2007). After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia continued to have a civil war in the northern and western parts of Cambodia along the Cambodian-Thai border.



*Kraing Ta Chan Mass Killing Site
Source: Man Sokkoeun*

The civil war ended in 1991 when all the warring parties signed a peace agreement in Paris on October 23. The war ended, but the legacy of war and atrocity remained: impunity and broken social fabric, thousands of orphaned children, hundreds of thousands of widowed women and hand-icapped men, millions of land mines scattered in the battle zones, and those who lived through the KR regime were severely traumatised by their experience.

Youk Chhang, Director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam) called Cambodia a broken society – broken people living in a broken society – “all victims and survivors are like broken glass that you try to glue back together”. Through the peace process, national reconciliation, unity and political stability were strengthened and maintained. In the meantime, the need for justice for crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge was raised by the Cambodian people. The establishment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) was made between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations fifty years after the peace agreement.

Memorialisation of mass atrocity/genocide

Memorials invite a tremendous range of engagement, from the intimately private identification with the representation that may emanate from the victims and their families, to the less direct, less intense but nonetheless evocative, comparative response a memorial might catalyse for a host of publics. (Hite 2007:124)

People create their own ways to remember and to confront their past in order to heal the wounds of the victims and survivors who were dehumanised and severely violated, and to reconstruct the social fabric to ensure that the atrocities will never happen again. The past can be transformed into different meanings and narratives by different people according to their perspectives, their positions, and experiences. Some other people use images of the past and memory in the present for the present purposes (Olick 2007).

Memorialisation process after violent conflicts

In order to deal with the past, there are different processes of memorialisation around the world after violent conflicts, depending on social, political, and cultural contexts. Some processes are initiated by the state and are called state-driven processes. Some others are seen as individu-

al-driven processes. And other processes are facilitated by an outsider or an NGO. However, the process of memorialisation is also coordinated by civil society with cooperation of the local authority and sponsored by the government.

Naidu raised the importance of the participation of victims in the consultation process (Naidu 2006). The participation of victims and survivors in the process of memorialisation is valuable because they are able to shape their vision toward the Legacy of Memory. This process also shows the social identity of victims because they have shared sentiment and sameness over a particular time. It is powerful if they can work together collectively for the “never again” and sustainable peace.

So, a memorial is meaningful if the process is initiated by the victims and survivors themselves. A so-called victim-driven process has been seen in a few countries like Peru and Chile in which the memorials and museum of memory were initiated by victim associations and human rights organisations (Bickford 2005). This can determine the ownership of the process by the victims. The victims mobilise themselves and demand memorials or symbolic reparation so that those memorials will represent them, their groups, their concerns, and their interests.

Peruvian women who lost their husbands during the civil war are still waiting for their lost husbands and relatives. They have carried out many activities in order to remember the civil war which lasted from 1980 to 2000. They created a victims’ organisation, memorial places, and a mobile exhibition of memory-related arts to inform the public that this kind of civil war will not be forgotten and will not happened again.

According to Kastenholz, Mama Angelica Mendoza, a Peruvian woman who lost her son in 1983 in the civil war, established a victims’ organisation called ANFASEP (Kastenholz 2009). Many more women who lost their relatives, husbands, and their sons started to get involved with her to fight against injustices they experienced, like sex abuse and other psychological and physical violence perpetrated by soldiers. ANFASEP created a museum of memory (Museo de la Memoria) to remember all the victims of the civil war and sensitise the society of Peru to what happened during the civil war period.

This museum is an obvious example of a mechanism to handle the past. Many visitors listen to those women telling their experience of war. It is a place where they can exchange their thoughts and feelings with the visitors and it is a place where children can ask their parents about the war. There are many creative aspects to the museum, like a wall painting about the lives of old women during the time of war, and a place for remembering the husbands and sons who were lost, a memory park, memory shop, and a meeting room for discussion and exchange of ideas.

So the museum as a Legacy of Memory is very valuable and the ANFASEP women are very proud of their legacy, which they were able to create with meaningful memories for themselves and the future generation.

The Eye that Cries is another successful memorial in Peru. It was initiated by the Peruvian human rights community and it represents the first seminal piece of a larger memorial project (Hite 2007).

If the process of memory is initiated by political parties or other political groups then the level of representation of the victims or community people is not fully included and or considered and the community dynamic is very poor for participating in the process. Another real example of a memorial called "Trojan Horse" in Cape Town in South Africa was rejected by the victims because they did not participate in the consultation process. The victims' voices and inputs were not included in the process of creating that memorial (Bickford 2005).

Memorialisation process in the context of Cambodia

In Cambodia there are around 388 killing sites with 19,744 mass graves of those killed, 81 memorials and 196 prisons².

The memorials started in Cambodia after the fall of the KR regime, for example the S-21 genocide museum, Cheang EK killing field, Kraing Ta Chan, Samrong Knong and many other memorials across Cambodia, were initiatives of the political leaders, the so-called "top-down approach". The state started the whole process of preserving the skulls and bones of the dead to show the world the atrocity of what happened in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 (Khamboly 2007).

According to Khamboly, there are 81 memorials constructed by the Cambodian state to preserve the evidence of the deaths, including skulls, bones, clothes, and mass killing graves. This means that the state initiated the process for those memorials. Those memorials did not involve victims. For instance, Tuol Sleng S-21 was prepared by Vietnamese soldiers immediately after the collapse of the KR regime. The Vietnamese troops organised that place and maintained it as evidence of the atrocities and to justify their presence in Cambodia (Williams 2004). The idea of memorials is to value and respect the dead in Buddhist practice and for the remembrance and for the preservation of the evidence of atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge.

2/ see http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Killing-Fieldmap_070402.jpg

Memory, especially after conflict, can continue to influence how people understand, feel, and behave in the present and future and it can transform in the same way as trauma transforms people. Lederach states that the challenge of post conflict peace-building lies in increasing the individual and collective mechanisms that provide us with a space to remember and step toward change (Lederach 1997). The process of the Legacy of Memory is to create space and encourage people, especially victims, to express themselves individually and work together in a collective effort to achieve the shared vision and actions initiated and prepared by the community.

The consultation processes should focus on community empowerment strategies, and any new initiatives to work with the community should aim to enhance and support local capacities and initiatives by facilitating the process that results in a shared vision (Naidu 2006). This is important in the context of Cambodia where people have suffered so much and were oppressed by a repressive regime and had genocide or mass violence manipulated by political ideology perpetrated upon them for a long time and both victims and survivors, including the next generation, suffered from the effects of this repressive regime. Memorials are mechanisms that reach down to the community level and can provide a safe space for victims, survivors, heroes, and perpetrators to engage in dialogue and telling of the truth.

Panhavuth Long³ in the consultation meeting, mentioned that memorials have to be relevant and meaningful to victims and the people of the community for the common good not for the benefit of an individual (Panhavuth Long 2009). Memorials play important roles in healing, restoring community, documenting what happened or truth telling.

The International Center for Conciliation⁴ (ICfC) has introduced the methodology of anthropology to the villages in six provinces of Cambodia where mass killing sites exist. ICfC staff conducted ground preparation and assessment (field work) and remained for about ten days in the target villages in order to have a conversation and dialogue about the KR regime and find out the real needs and genuine ideas or initiatives to help them come up with a Legacy of Memory or some symbolic markers within the villages which can remain for generations. The methodology of anthropology values the concepts and ideas of people who are only influenced by

3/ Panhavuth Long is a programme coordinator of the Cambodia Justice Initiative.

4/ International Center for Conciliation (ICfC) works to help people on all sides to confront the horrors of history and their painful memories so they, as leaders, are motivated by empathy rather than vengeance and can construct a shared trustful, peaceful, and productive future.(<http://www.centerforconciliation.org>).

the scientific approach. The successful results enabled the building of five stupas to respect the dead and one big banner about the KR leaders to help people remember the past atrocities.

However, this methodology is not enough in the context of Cambodia because it is not multipurpose and did not create a two way conversation or interactive dialogue. After the construction of the stupa, we don't have a story to tell through it. The stupas were built to restore and maintain the skulls and bones of the dead and to remember the atrocity of what happened and to pay respect to the spirits of the dead. The results are not different from the memorials constructed by the state during the 1980s.

ICfC staff reflected on how to improve the strategy and implementation process and to incorporate the methodology into a context in which they can keep, value and honour the genuine ideas and initiatives of the people of the community. The methodology of anthropology may work well if a society is free, people have a good education, and religious domination is not strong. After reflection, it was realised that there is a need to facilitate and to increase understanding among the people so that they can expand their ideas about how to build their Legacy of Memory. One theory or methodology works well in one context, but may not work well in another.

To know "why Khmer killed Khmer," some sort of national or community-based truth-telling mechanism is needed to address societal healing and reconciliation using non-judicial mechanisms beyond the ECCC. Any non-judicial mechanisms and activities dealing with the legacy of the past must take into serious consideration the sensitivity of the social and political contexts and also have to be based on culture and tradition (OSJI, 2006).

Collective memory is part of non-judicial mechanisms that work toward restorative justice and societal healing in the transitional justice process. Cambodia itself has to search for a balance between justice, truth, and reconciliation after the decade of atrocities, armed conflict (civil war), gross human rights abuse, and impunity.

The ECCC alone, due to its scope and limitations, is not enough to find the truth and to seek healing. Perpetrators from the lowest levels will never tell what happened and what they did during the KR period because, according to the internal rule of the ECCC, lower level perpetrators are not supposed to be accountable for their crimes. There are many stories to be told and heard from those perpetrators in order to compare them with the stories of the victims, survivors and heroes in order to be able to see the common truths.

Forms of memorialisation

There are many symbols for remembering the past, such as public monuments, memorials, and museums. Bickford mentions that “those symbols shape the physical landscape of collective memory and *memoryscapes* recapture public spaces and transform them into the sites of memory and alternative truth-telling about the authoritarian past” (Bickford 2005).

There are various forms of memorialisation around the world. However, those forms are categorised as permanent or temporary. Those include the renaming of public facilities, plaques, exhibitions, museums and monuments (Naidu 2006).

In Cambodia, memorialisation has been done through documentation of historic memory, compiling stories of survivors, building stupas, and the celebration of Buddhist rituals, including testimony. Other forms of memorialisation include commemoration day, song, poem, art work, theatre, intergenerational dialogue, and history education. The idea is to remember and for the healing process to move forward. Those different forms of memorialisation actually call attention to justice and the acknowledgement of those who fought against injustices. A memorial is especially about the victims. It is about the victim's story. Victims can initiate the conversations to engage different groups of people and different generations. Any conversations without the participation of victims are false and untrue (Bickford 2005).

Throughout this process, there was not enough participation of victims and survivors. The idea was to respect the spirits of the dead and to preserve the evidence of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Those memorials, including the S-21 genocide museum in Cambodia, were not designed for interactive dialogue or two-way conversation. They were built for religious purposes and for political propaganda.

The memory issue is still in the minds of the Cambodian people, especially the survivors and victims who had difficulty telling their stories to their children, grandchildren, and the public. There is a big gap and a poor connection between the generation of the survivors and the generation of the children of the survivors due to the fact that the younger generation can hardly believe that such a regime – as told to them by their parents – can exist (Münyas, 2005). This gap creates a vicious cycle of victimisation and trauma transfer. The role of the next generation is important to the process of healing and the breaking the cycle of trauma transferred to them by their family members.

Approaches to building local memory initiatives in Cambodia

Consultation process

We found that the results of the consultation process are valuable and practical. We can use a lot of the information to develop new projects. Furthermore, the community already started the process of project implementation as they got further involved in the existing programme and continued building on the ideas they came up with during the consultation process. This on-going process will bring dynamics and a sustainability mechanism to the Legacy of Memory within the community. However, the need for outsiders to head up the process is important. For example, the YFP led the art workshop which allowed survivors to draw what they experienced during the KR period on paper and the walls of the building. Other types of support to start work or move the process forward is also necessary for the community, for instance to organise public events to increase public awareness and acknowledgement of the memorial committees formed by the communities themselves.

Key actors in group dynamics

We found that three main stakeholders – local authority, monks and young people – play important roles in the process of collective memory. The local authority helps mobilise the people to be involved in the activities and monks tell the truth and play a role in fundraising for the legacy work. The young people play a crucial role in collecting and compiling stories of the survivors and organising events. The roles of monks and young people are very important in order to stimulate the process of change and the dynamics of discussion in the process of consultation because youth represents energy and the hope of the community. In addition, youth plays an active role in connecting both generations – survivors and children of survivors – to generate a situation of story tellers and listeners. Observations indicated that young people are more engaged and involved in giving good suggestions and even planned their own initiatives of how to start a project within their own community.

Participatory approach or community empowerment strategies by outsiders

We learned that, in the Cambodian context, the Legacy of Memory will work with a careful and creative participatory approach to empower and to facili-

tate victim or survivor collective memory initiatives. Without the intervention of outsiders with the proper approaches, like facilitation or the participatory approach, giving guidance and instruction, people in the community will not come together easily, especially on the issue of memory, because the feelings of fear and the painful memories of the past and the impunity of the present society is embedded in the minds of the Cambodian people.

We found that the Legacy of Memory (memory culture) can work in the community through facilitating the process by using community empowerment strategies to empower all the stakeholders involved to be active in building their own meaning of the past, because the Legacy of Memory requires collective efforts and actions. The effort of the community memory process needs the commitment of local people and collective efforts and capacity development. The community collectively develops the Legacy of Memory and presents the results to the larger public, the higher levels of authority and government departments and institutions.

Historical memory work methods at the local level and action plans (short and long term) have provided a powerful motivation and clear tasks and directions of what to achieve in the short and long term so that each committee is able to focus its attention and efforts in building the Legacy of Memory. It is meaningful in the Cambodian context because this process is created by practical work not by words.

Story telling

We found that story telling is a good technique to connect people to the discussion and bring back a clear situation of what happened during the KR era in each location in the provinces. People started to share their experiences and past memories with the group. It was good that those various social groups shared their feelings and sentiments about the KR era. This brought a feeling of sameness of experience, common purpose and shared visions for the lessons learned from a past that should never come back again.

Arts and memory

Drawing a picture of the location of a memory project is good because people then have an overall view and a concept of the topic. They also discuss the meaning of the objects, for example a statue, the painting of pictures, and the action which describes the torture and killing during the Khmer Rouge regime. There is an advantage to working with the Legacy of Memory (memory culture) through the arts because victims can easily express themselves and tell their stories with feeling and emotion through pictures and drawings.

Understanding and working side by side

We found that with this kind of project – Legacy of Memory (memory culture) – we cannot use a quick fix solution, to come and go quickly like in a development project or the building of an irrigation system. The legacy of memory needs to create the process and to spend time and achieve understanding. We learned that after the consultation workshop, YFP works with the people on capacity building issues, financial and technical support, and ultimately turns over the whole process, including leadership, to the community through memorial committees.

Broadening knowledge and motivation of involved stakeholders

We found that the presentation of the concepts of memory culture around the world is very important because this motivates participants to understand the different types of work regarding memory in its respective social, political, and cultural contexts. This presentation also leads to opening up the minds of the stakeholders involved in order to balance different perspectives – to not only stick to the religious dimension. As a result, each location where consultation took place came up with a different way of building the Legacy of Memory.

The lesson is that if we try not to influence or broaden the knowledge of the participants and their understanding, the values of Buddhism will influence the way people want to create their memorialisation. As a result of state, individual, and ICfC initiatives that worked on the memorials process, in almost every location people liked to build a stupa – except the Muslim communities. The meaning of a stupa is respect for the dead, so there is no multiple purpose of a memorial in relation to education, interactive conversation, and learning, including religious value and practice.

Coordination among outsiders for intervention

We found that the roles of outsiders in intervention for human rights, peace, and development work are too strong and not well-coordinated. Some interventions create the bad habit of paying for community participation. In those interventions, for example, participants ask for money for their participation. This is not a way to address the Legacy of Memory. The concept is to facilitate a contribution from the community and to take care of the process and inputs from the community. The need is to stress the role of insiders to build up their own history in the context they are living in, trying to make the representation meaningful for themselves and future generations. This is obvious and necessary.

Conclusion

This document explores the possibility of coming up with a Legacy of Memory in areas known for mass killing during the Khmer Rouge regime. The same sentiment was echoed in the village dialogues and community consultations: the people want to understand their past; they want to confront present issues so as to positively shape their future. They want a Legacy of Memory to be meaningful to them and to succeeding generations. Although more work needs to be done, the initial round of village dialogues and consultations showed that an enabling environment that promotes a climate of trust for people to speak up and reveal their sentiments, thoughts and past experience will enable people to come up with their own understanding of a Legacy of Memory and how they can implement this in their respective communities.

In short, in order to transform those local memorial sites into a centre for dialogue and education, the participatory approach is necessary in order to develop vision and collective efforts. Empathy is necessary for the participation of various stakeholders in the community. Youth for Peace (YFP) sees the importance of this process and the consultation workshops which were conducted in order to see the different roles of insiders and outsiders in collective memory in the context of Cambodia.

Through the whole process of village dialogues and consultation different core elements (concepts) and strategies were introduced, including equalising of expectations, story-telling by individuals about the mass killing sites, including group discussion on how they survived during the KR period, plus the feedback from the conference/workshop and the turning over to the community of the results that involved the participants in the planning and strategies that brought individual and community commitment to come up with a Legacy of Memory and say “never again” to genocide and a repressive regime, and to an understanding of the past in order to confront the present and to positively shape the future

The participatory approach we used through dialogue and consultation has resulted in a meaningful Legacy of Memory for the individuals and the people who represent the community and nation's identity. We remember the people who suffered and perished through a living and dynamic process and through symbols or a place of worship, a venue for healing, truth seeking, learning and moving forward. In this sense, the mass killing sites have become centres for dialogue and peace building. However, we still have our limitations in terms of capacity, resources, and time constraints, as well as the limits imposed by the economic situation and the educational aspects of the community in which we have to connect with people and find a balance between the past and present in order move

forward. Further research is necessary to measure the results and the impact and the sustainability of the projects.

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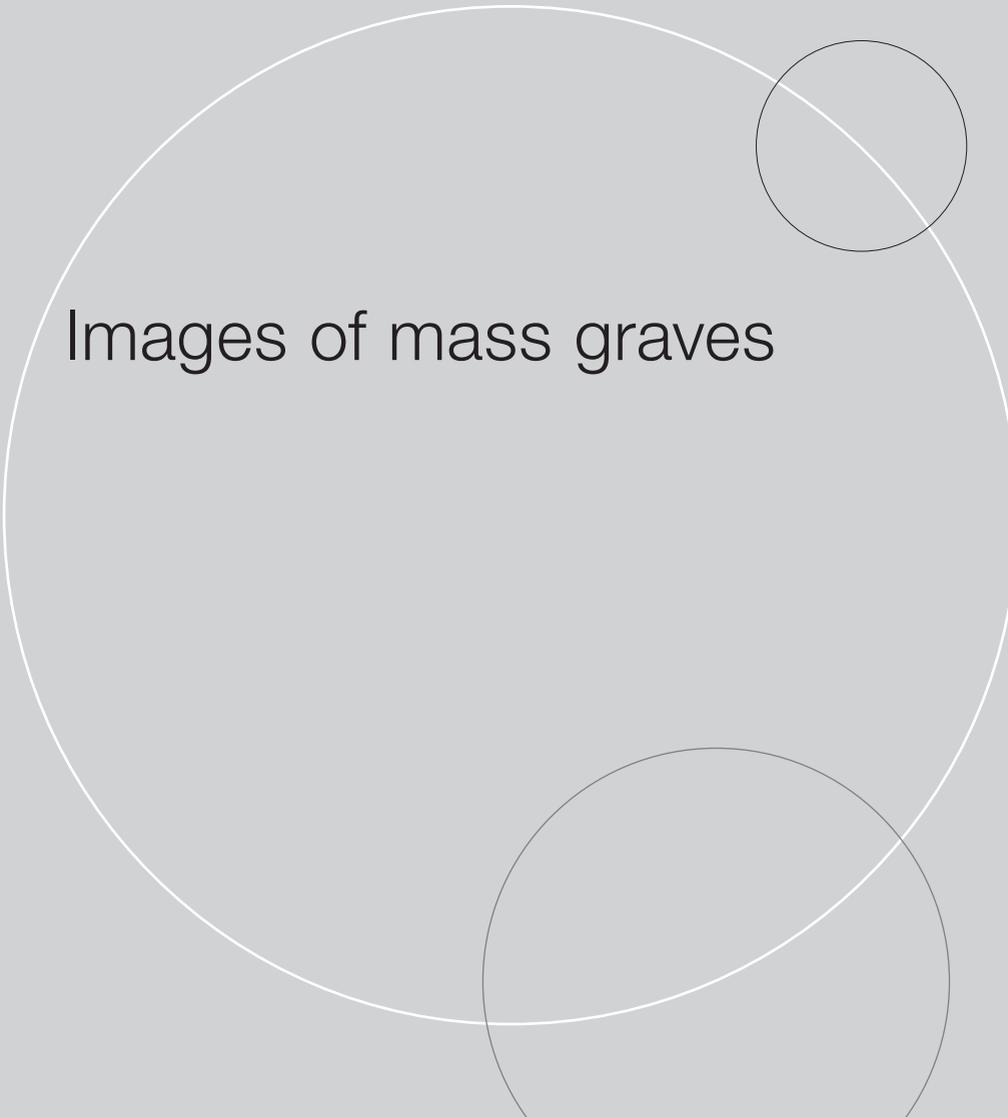
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Images of mass graves

Landscapes of fear – cultural and societal responses to vegetation on contested and abandoned killing sites

The article proposes a search for new, inclusive methodologies that could be applied to the study of mass grave sites. To include mass grave sites into social imaginaries as described by Taylor, the historical and archaeological research need to be accompanied by cultural and anthropological research. State-orchestrated memorial initiatives, centralised memory projects and transnational activist networks oftentimes fail to save a mass grave site from oblivion. That may be due to the lack of thorough analysis of indigenous commemoration practices (or, to put it in other words: positive and negative acts of referring to a post-conflict site). The author advocates a cultural analysis of mass grave meanings, which includes both the societal as well as the communal level.

Something is not quite right – but why?

“Something isn’t quite right” noted the British geographer Andrew Charlesworth in his 2004 report on three different encounters with the site of the former Plaszow concentration camp in Poland. Charlesworth took a group of students to the site in 1993 and then repeatedly again in 1995 and 1996 – just around the time when the site became famous as a film set for the Hollywood blockbuster *Schindler’s List*. As it was then, it is still today: Plaszow is wild, not transformed into a memory site, with three mass graves on its premises. When walking through the site, Charlesworth noted the reactions and comments of students: that “Something isn’t quite right but we don’t know what it is that is wrong.” (Charlesworth 2004: 293)

“It is a strange place” – that line is often repeated in written accounts referring to abandoned killing sites and mass graves. This frequent impression of things that do not fit, of topographical clashes and of a discrepancy or disproportion between the viewer and the surroundings resurfaces in the narrations of those who visit the places and refer to them as I have termed them: “non-sites of memory” (Sendyka 2014). The *negativity* of killing sites and mass graves results in them being abandoned, neglected and forlorn. As post-conflict sites of mass-violence, they retain the right to commemoration according to European memory culture, but until today most of them have gotten no or little official attention. They might be described as *suppressed*, *silenced*, *censored* and *spooky*, generating a particular kind of affective aura that becomes their trademark.

My cultural analysis of such sites will start from the very question: What is it that “isn’t quite right?” What is it that visitors find so unsettling, so disturbing? A recent response comes from the Austrian writer Martin Pollack, whose 2014 essayistic reportage was titled provocatively *Kontaminierte Landschaften* (Contaminated Landscapes). This powerful meditation on his childhood landscapes in Austria starts from idyllic, peaceful, stunning green sites of woods and Arcadia-like gardens. Yet the hypnotising beauty of the views is nothing but a lie, since it “[...] hides mass graves. Some of them known, others unknown.” (Pollack 2014: 27). Pollack uses multiple synonyms to describe land holding the anonymous dead: the sites are not only *contaminated*, but also *tainted*, *polluted*, *poisoned*, and *curled*. In a final elegant metaphor he points out the reason for the corruption: The sites are “contaminated, polluted by the recent historical events.” because of our “recent past that has been poisoned by conflicts, massacres, retaliations, displacements, expulsions and mutual blaming” (Pollack 2014: 106). But throughout the text a reader may find a different diagnosis: The sites are polluted – quite literally – by corpses and “[...] all the land is poisoned by all those cadavers, that never got a proper burial”,

as Pollack quotes a Ukrainian Jew named Chaim Brandler, whom he met in a village near Lviv (Pollack 2014: 85).

Killing sites and local life

In his rich and multilayered analysis, Pollack draws possible cultural readings from the abandoned killing sites and mass graves of Eastern Europe. He focuses to a large extent on accounts received from *in situ* witnesses. I would like to stress the local, topographically limited existence and resonance of the sites. Since the locations in question have not been spoken of for various reasons (which would need additional, individual and localised analysis) for decades, they do not exist on the shared societal level of discourse. It may be said that for many years they have been pushed outside the spectrum which has been called the “social imaginaries” by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. These imaginary social environments are a complex set of “expectations and common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life.” (Taylor 2004: 24). They are an assembly of values, institutions, laws, and symbols which are common to a particular society and which enable people to imagine and manage social life. If abandoned mass graves have been removed from shared social imaginaries, they are nowadays unspoken-of, unimaginable, buried in public silence. We cannot build collective social practices around them.

Abandoned mass graves may be forced out of the societal symbolic exchange but they do not cease to exist. They work on a lower level: not the country-wide, state-approved, societal, but on the communal level. Local communities develop regulations, practices and narratives about the unmemorialised anonymous killing sites since they cannot force a site out of their imaginaries, since a given site is *still there*. This would mean that such sites are still somehow socially managed – even without support from historical research, official narrative and academic definitions. They fall into the temporal dimension where Pierre Nora placed his pre-historic, pre-modern, close-to-primordial *millieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989) that do not know or need the discourses and practices of history. According to Nora, *millieux de mémoire* (“real environments of memory”), reside in “[...] gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (Nora 1989: 13). This embodied, performative, non-symbolic and deeply pre-modern way of remembering has been described as “true memory” by Nora.

In his study on *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton develops a similar concept of memory which is “sedimented, or amassed, in the body” (Connerton 1989: 72). As a scholar of performance studies, Joseph Roach advocated taking a closer look at the “living memory” which remains “variously resistant” to forgetting through a “transition of gestures, habits, and skills” (Roach 1996: 26). This will be my endeavour here.

To make a point: I would claim that abandoned mass grave sites are not only historical sites, but also, or even predominantly, legendary ones.

Local myths, legends and bans around killing sites

As far as the abandoned sites belong to local, communal lives and not the national, state-official ones, it is vital to pay special attention to indigenous responses to the nearby existence of anonymous mass graves. The local-level responses are of a clearly pre-modern type: the embodied memory of negative gestures, diverted walks, secret glances is accompanied by legends, myths, rituals and taboos. Animals and plants become bearers or media of such a memory. For example, in Marcinów, a village in Poland, researchers from the Polish Zapomniane Foundation and the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries were confronted with stories of an inexplicable behaviour of cows passing meadows over mass graves¹. Pollack describes a similar scene when reporting a meeting with a local farmer in the village of Rohatyń, who approached the researchers working on the site of a mass grave from 1942, and gave, unasked, a most startling account: “[...] since the Jews were buried there, everything has come to an end. The land does not want to yield crops, [...] nothing decent wants to grow there, whatever we tried to plant, beets, cabbage, buckwheat, potatoes, – the land was infertile, and it used to give the best crops in the old days...” He continued: “the piece of land was later used as a pasture, but cows were not giving milk and were giving birth to dead calves” (Pollack 2014: 91).

Possible reactions to such “poisoned” sites are to *mythologise* or *legendise* (as a restatement of a past fact in a non-historical discourse) them. Another elementary answer to an anonymous mass grave is of a performative quality. To give an example from Trześniów (a village in southeastern Poland): From a witness named Roman Wojtuń, the researchers from Zapomniane heard a detailed account of prohibitions observed by a local community in relation to a mass grave of a number of Jews killed by police

^{1/} From a private conversation, May 8th, 2015.

collaborators. The bystanders of the massacre and their descendants developed and passed on multiple bans such as: “Do not pick mushrooms from there!”, “Do not eat wild raspberries from this site!”, “Do not collect wood at that place!”, “Do not play!” or “Do not sit there!” and finally: “Do not go there?” The prohibitions were unsupported by explanations. Therefore the sites were perceived as strange, cursed, or threatening.

The phenomena of *narrative mythologisation* and *performative prohibition* have to be studied by anthropologists. Tentative explanations of these processes will most probably lead us to the well-known fear of the corpse. In Western culture we are scared of contagion, plague, death, and the impenetrable future represented by the corpse. In both ancient and contemporary cultures, we may find a belief that the soul leaves the body, then travels to another dimension. The empty body needs a funeral that will provide a form of “closure”, “distance”, and “protection” from a menacing, empty, human-like but no longer human form. From the Assyrians until today, as Christine Quigley shows in her history of the corpse, it is widely believed that noncompliance with the steps to set up a symbolic as well as physical barrier between the living and the dead may result in the spirit of the dead rising and plaguing those around (Quigley 2005: 16-19).

Ghosts of memory

This explanation of why mass graves are feared and not spoken of within local communities is in an unexpected way supported by radical proponents of ecological studies. They claim that the recollection of suffering and death still resides in corpses, since the events immediately preceding death have been remembered at the neurone level. The ties of these neurones with consciousness have been permanently damaged with the destruction of consciousness during the act of murder. Following this point of view still further, neurological scripts of traumata that have been deprived of a conscious subject are still engraved in decaying neurones and become a material part of the local habitat. It is perhaps precisely this type of intuition that allows for the easy supposition that on abandoned mass graves “something isn’t quite right”. The alleged “phantom” of floating neuronal scripts devoid of their living host may take a very physical form. A case well-documented by the local press in Kozie Górki (Poland) took place at the site of a mass grave at Niepołomice near Krakow. Bluish-gold “light-clouds” of human-like forms were reported by many witnesses. The

2/ Ibid.

clouds were moving, approaching the observer, rising slightly above the ground³. Scholars attribute the phenomenon of spontaneous combustion to the release of the gases from the decomposition of shallowly buried corpses. Moreover, waters contaminated by decomposing bodies and differences in the constitution of plants may lead to a change in the behaviour of animals and humans (Żychowski 2008). In this way, the non-human world affects mass grave sites. One can assume that not only specialists can read the signs, but that the communities living nearby can perceive the signs on an intuitional level. Inexplicable and strange, these signs are turned into ghost stories and become the reason for imposing taboos and bans.

Another rational description of natural phenomena related to the existence of mass graves has been provided by researchers of ecosystems. In a recent text by W. Laundré, Lucina Hernández and William J. Ripple entitled *The Landscape of Fear: Ecological Implications of Being Afraid* the authors claim that animals have the ability to learn and can respond to changing levels of predation risk. The authors claim that sites witnessing mass killings are remembered by animals as “[...] landscape of fear; a three dimensional landscape whose peaks and valleys are defined by the level of predation risk related to changes in habitat as they affect the lethality of the predator.” (Laundré et al. 2010: 2) If this is true, anthropologists may assume that humans respond to these landscapes of fear as well. Repressed traumata or “[...] an unthought known” – those experiences may structure human response to sites of mass killings. And even though visitors to these sites may know about this concept, they would usually be unable to think about it (to use a concept formulated by Christopher Bollas in 1980. (Bollas 1987: 46). Due to the lack of ritual closure (as expressed by a burial, a memorial, a monument or a tombstone), performative prohibitions are developed to guide a passage around a threatening site to avoid becoming entangled in a landscape of fear.

To sum up the preliminary cultural analysis of natural dimensions of mass graves scattered throughout the “Bloodlands” (Snyder 2010) of Eastern Europe, I would like to stress the discrepancy between meanings developed on a local level and those developed at the centres of academic knowledge (like universities, forensic research groups or conferences of specialists discussing mass graves). Rational conceptualisations based on factual knowledge collide with mythologisation based on “unthought knowledge”. This may be the reason why local unvoiced policies, practices and customs often clash with official state or European cultural and memo-

^{3/} Source: <http://www.up.krakow.pl/konspekt/11/zychowska.html> (retrieved 20.04.2016).

rial strategies. It may explain why the efforts to restore abandoned mass grave sites in order to include them into symbolic circulation and social imaginaries are so often doomed to fail. Locals, living close to traumatic “poisoning” or “contaminated” sites for decades developed their means to manage their interaction with these sites. Activists arriving from one of the academic centres of knowledge, with the intent to reinstate a new symbolic order while disregarding the silent local performative memorialisation are thus often misunderstood, ignored or maybe even angrily chased-off.

To bridge the gap between the two temporalities (A: pre-modern quasi-timeless vernacular dimension and B: a modern dimension focusing on the abandoned and forgotten mass grave sites) a cultural broker is needed. A number of actors could possibly assume such a role: public activists, grassroots historians or writers like Martin Pollack and others such as: Elfriede Jelinek (Jelinek 2009), Andrzej Stasiuk (Stasiuk 2014) or Oksana Sabuschko (Sabuschko 2010). I would also like to mention the efforts undertaken by visual artists, stressing their important role in a process of reclaiming the forgotten site and bringing it into common awareness. Quite frequently the first person to see the site differently, as an autonomous place, entitled to its name, history and symbolic memory, is a photographer. The mass grave that for many had just disappeared in the woods, invisible to others, for some obscured, suddenly becomes visible. It is through photographic works by Mikael Levin (*A War Story*, 1995), Dirk Reinartz (*Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps*, 1995), Susan Silas (*Helmbrechts Walk*, 1993–2003), Indre Šerpytyte (*Forest Brothers*, 2011), Andrzej Kramarz (*A Piece of Land*, 2008-2009), Roz Mortimer (*Reduced to Silence*, 2012), Sandra Vitaljić (*Infertile grounds*, 2009), Jason Francisco (*Alive and Destroyed*, 2011-2013) and Ansgar Gilster (*Dead Corners*) that both the newcomers as well as the local neighbours to the site can regain the ability to see it in such a way that its legends stop obfuscating its history. That is a fertile moment that can give birth to shared memory, well integrated, finally, in social imaginaries.

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Ansgar Gilster

Beyond the Monuments – Photographing the “forgotten” sites of the Holocaust

In his essay, the author describes his photographic expeditions to both well-known and “forgotten” sites of the Holocaust, reflecting on the particular atmosphere and melancholic state of mind he experienced at “forgotten” sites in Eastern Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states.

There were times when I believed that I had some understanding of the Holocaust. It formed part of my studies and research and I followed the academic as well as the public discourse on the subject. I was interested in the representation of remembrance, read plenty of books and met several survivors. Still, even back then, I would have never claimed to have fully understood the phenomenon of the Holocaust. Yet I believed that I had managed to get a grasp of what happened. As a matter of fact, I knew nothing so far.

By then I had already visited several former concentration camps and was fascinated by their tidy emptiness. Even on my first visit to Buchenwald – by now eleven years ago – I brought my camera and photographed. Thinking back, I may have believed that my camera could function like a time-machine. I was looking for a spatial perspective that would also be temporal – in other words: Trying to outflank time and trying to get close. And I tried in many ways: The Auschwitz museum kindly agreed to open its gates at night for me and I walked both the Stammlager and Birkenau in deepest darkness. Moreover, they opened the doors of Block 28, which used to be the camp's "hospital". It is a building kept in the condition of the days of the liberation of the camp and I walked through the rooms which looked like they had just been abandoned. Moving on, I reached the pitch-black darkness, the blackness in the basement of the building which used to be the morgue where the corpses of the murdered had been stored. Although nothing was visible in the complete darkness, I felt that I had seen everything there was to see – not only in this particular building, but at Auschwitz in general. As a matter of fact, I had not seen anything yet.

Things changed after I moved to Poland in 2011 and rented a room in Łódź – maybe better known under the names of Lodz or Litzmannstadt. My new home was in an apartment building standing exactly where the main synagogue had been. In the basement of the building, some old bricks of the synagogue were still visible. Even on the streets of Łódź the past was not so far away – particularly in the rather shabby-looking neighbourhood of "Bałuty" where the former Jewish ghetto had been.

The old backyards and streets seemed like an empty stage and soon I started exploring, reading the buildings like books. I entered every backyard and climbed every fence I could find, walked up the old staircases with my feet touching their well-worn steps and breathed the distinctive sour smell of lime and mould and dust. Looking from the windows onto the streets, I saw much more than the city of today. I envisioned what I knew and had read.

Time melts in Bałuty quicker than ice cream, particularly on hot summer evenings. By the fading evening light, the stage scene of Bałuty



Field in Soghanlugh, Georgia. The field belongs to a farm run during the 1930s and 40s by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), closely associated with the Soviet secret police, near the Soghanlugh settlement which is located a few kilometers outside the Georgian capital Tbilisi. The field has been identified by Georgian NGO SovLab as one of the areas possibly containing mass graves from the Great Purge 1937/1938.



Soghanlugh



*Urban space in the Vake district of Tbilisi. An unknown number of victims – but at least several hundred – were shot in this area of Tbilisi. Formerly located on the outskirts of Tbilisi, Vake has developed into a prestigious neighbourhood since the 1950s when a great number of representative residential buildings (nicknamed *Stalinki* in Russian) were build here. According to an urban myth dating back to this period, Vake was built “on human bones”.*



The same area from a different perspective. Vake today is still a prestigious residential area, with some of those houses erected during the 1950s being pulled down to make space for even bigger residential buildings.



The basement of this house in the centre of Telavi (the second largest town in Georgia) was used from 1921 to 1936 as a prison of the Soviet secret police. People were tortured and also shot here. Many victims inscribed their names on the walls of their prison cells, which can still be read today. The building is still in its original state, no renovation measures have been carried out since the 1930s.



Part of the “academic town” in the Saburtalo district of Tblissi. A Soviet secret police Cheka squad was stationed in military barracks close by. Prisoners of the Cheka were executed and buried on site. The remaining barracks are now used by an English preschool.



An estimated 90- to 100-thousand people were shot, burned and buried in Lisinichi forest, close to Lviv, Ukraine. The improvised sign pointing to a hole in the ground reads "garbage".



About 10,000 Jews were murdered at this huge death pit in the centre of Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine. An entire soccer field fits into it.

comes to life. Long beams of golden sunlight illuminate blue shadows like spotlights. The silhouette of an old man appears. A child plays. A woman carries a baby.

In these fragments, the ghetto was no longer abstract nor distant. It was right there – and I was in the middle of it. Thinking back now, I can hardly explain why I never carried a camera on these evening walks. Were these moments too fragile to photograph or did I not trust the camera? I still do not know.

Two years before, during the late summer of 2009, I had attended a conference in Vilnius where Timothy Snyder presented some thoughts on what he called the “ignored reality” of the Holocaust. He developed and published these thoughts later on and the reader might be familiar with them. Yet just to summarise the main argument of these thoughts in a few words: Snyder claims that our view of the Holocaust is distorted by the case of Auschwitz. During the Holocaust many – if not more – victims were killed by bullets than by gas. Yet we do not speak about their deaths. We mainly remember Auschwitz, because some of its prisoners managed to survive, because Auschwitz was designed as a death factory and a labour camp. But no one came back from the camps designed solely for killing. This is the reason why we hardly ever speak about the extermination camps Majdanek, Treblinka, Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Janowska or Maly Trostinec.

Furthermore, Snyder argues that Auschwitz excludes the largest victim group: hardly any Polish and Soviet Jews were murdered in Auschwitz. By 1943 and 1944, when most western European Jews were killed, the Holocaust was in large measure already completed. About two thirds of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust were already dead by the end of 1942, killed in the East.

I remembered these observations made by Snyder while experiencing the particular atmosphere in Łódź and picked up my camera again. And I went off to see the “bloodlands”. For more than half a year I travelled through Eastern Poland, Ukraine and Belarus and, later on, continued this journey in the Baltic states. My photographs changed drastically after just a few weeks of travelling – from black and white to colour, from film to digital and from beautiful to banal.

What did I find in these places? On the one hand, there is not much to see. The sites are difficult to find, as the grass on the graves is no less green than anywhere else. Where there used to be forest, there is still forest today. Where a synagogue stood, there now might be a highway. Camps turned into landscapes. And yet one can find a lot of traces for the simple reason that there is just not enough soil to bury so many people. I found bones or even shoes of victims lying scattered around in the wild. At the larger extermination sites and their surroundings, evidence is obvious: cubic me-

ters of human remains that became part of the landscape. Every mole-hill shows ash-grey soil, sprinkled with white pieces of ground bones. Snyder's "bloodlands" is no metaphor and the topography of the sites shows it: The meadows over the execution ditches are wrinkled like carpets. Eyewitnesses have reported that even days after the shootings the graves would still move and make waves. Not everyone was immediately dead. The waves are still visible now, as if they had been frozen for eternity.

In Monowitz, I entered factory buildings, unsure whether or not they were old enough to be part of the German factories attached to the camps. While groping my way through the dark basement, the beam of my torch met German inscriptions on the wall: *Notausgang, Kokerei, Zentral-lager*. Now I knew how old the buildings were. Nearby, in a grove, I found old rusty railroad tracks and wondered how old they might be, until I found an embossed stamp showing the year 1943.

Usually there is no need to guess – even without such clear hints. At the site of the former camp Maly Trostinec, I tried to locate the lake where the gas vans were cleaned after they had delivered their human cargo from the Minsk ghetto to the forest of Blagovshchina, with only an inaccurate hand-drawn map of the camp as help. Yet I did not get lost. The tree-lined avenue – then named "Eduard Strauch-Allee" after a notorious Nazi murderer, and which once led to the commandant's mansion – still exists today. Although the building and all the other structures of the camp are gone, the dirt tracks in the area still follow the roads of the camp. Turning from one of them into the scrub, I followed a small stream, which led to the lake I was looking for. Where vans had once been driven close to the water, a fisherman now patiently sat and waited.

To sum it up: My main experience at such sites was the simultaneity of the past and the present – often to a surreal degree. Just to give another example: At the so-called "airfield camp" – a former sub-camp of the larger Majdanek camp – the belongings of the murdered were sorted and disinfected, with clothes and shoes most probably piling up to the ceiling. The hangars still exist today, with a second-hand shop for clothes occupying them now. Piles of shoes and bundles of clothes – up to the ceiling – are stored in them.

The remains of this camp and other such places are rapidly disappearing. Only a few buildings of the "airfield camp" remain, among them the villa of Christian Wirth, the first commandant of Belzec and inspector of all "Operation Reinhard" camps. Among the garbage, I found remnants of Jewish tombstones, cut into pieces, once used as bricks. Currently, new apartment blocks are being built on the site. The tombstone pieces are already gone. But despite the changes, the contamination of these sites remains. There is still enough to photograph, there always will be.

List of authors



Bernd Bonwetsch studied History, Slavic studies and Pedagogy at the universities of Berlin, Stanford and Hamburg where he obtained his doctoral degree. He held the chair for East-European history at Ruhr University Bochum from 1980 until 2003, when he became founding director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow. Bernd Bonwetsch has published widely on Russian and Soviet history as well as on violence and violent conflicts in modern history besides implementing various major research projects.



Mihran Dabag is founding director of the Research Institute for Diaspora and Genocide-Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. After completing his studies in philosophy as a doctor philosophiae, Mihran Dabag worked as a researcher for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development before working as a Lector at the universities of Duisberg and Bochum. He has published widely on collective violence, nationalism history and identity. For his pioneering work on genocide studies in Germany, Mihran Dabag has been awarded with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.



Ansgar Gilster has studied in Berlin and holds a BA in history and an MA in Human Rights and Genocide Studies. He currently works as secretary of the chamber for migration and integration at the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD). Ansgar Gilster is editor at "OSTEUROPA" (an academic monthly on Eastern Europe published by the German Association for Eastern Europe Studies) and chairman of the annual German protestant church convention ("Kirchentag"). Ansgar Gilster runs a website (www.ansgargilster.de) on his photographic projects on abandoned mass grave sites.



Vanya Ivanova was the manager of the History project at DVV International South Eastern Europe from 2004-2009, working in the field of interactive methods of handling and teaching recent history in the Balkans. Since then, she has been engaged in various other projects and conferences implemented by DVV International. Together with Matthias Klingenberg, Vanya Ivanova has edited a publication on the relation of Youth and Adult Education, processing the past and development work (*Closing the Books or Keeping them Open? – International Perspectives on Adult Education*, vol. 66). She holds a PhD from the New Bulgarian University's Centre for European Refugees Migration and Ethnic Studies (CERMES).



Marc Junge is an expert in Soviet history, currently lecturing at Ruhr Universität Bochum. He wrote his doctoral thesis on the rehabilitation of N.I. Bucharin, followed by a habilitation treatise on the society of former political prisoners and forced labourers in the Soviet Union. Besides publishing various articles on Soviet history, Marc Junge implemented a major research project on mass repressions in the Soviet Union 1937-1938 together with Bernd Bonwetsch.



Long Khet is the founding director of Youth for Peace (YFP). He holds degrees from the Royal University of Phnom Penh and obtained an MA in Applied Conflict Transformation from the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) at Pannasastra University. After graduation, Long Khet worked for two years as a secondary school teacher in rural provinces of Cambodia and participated in a fellowship programme on Human Rights at Colombia University, New York. In his work, Long Khet focuses on memory initiative and post-conflict recovery as well as ASEAN integration.



Irakli Khvadagiani is a founding member and Research Director of the Georgian NGO Soviet Past Research Laboratory (SovLab). He holds a degree in journalism from Tbilisi State University and is currently enrolled as a PhD student at Ilya State University, in the History faculty. In his work with SovLab, Irakli Khvadagiani has engaged in various highly innovative projects regarding the history of Georgia in the 20th century.



Matthias Klingenberg studied Political Science and Contemporary History at the University of Heidelberg. He specialised in development theories and the history of the German Democratic Republic. For more than ten years, he has been working in the education and development sector for different German organisations. For almost a decade, he has been an active part of the DVV International History Network, and has been involved in history projects in Central Asia, the Caucasus and beyond. He is currently the Regional Director of DVV International for the Caucasus, Turkey and South-East-Europe.



Mikhail Rozhanskiy is a historian and sociologist. He was born in 1954 in Irkutsk, where he still lives today. As a doctoral candidate in Philosophical Sciences he carries out research on contemporary Siberian social history, working actively toward oral history objectives. Head of the Centre for Independent Social Research in Irkutsk (which he founded in 2002) and the Baikal International School for Sociological Research, he is also the creator of the *Studio for the Development of the Humanitarian Experience*, an educational methodology, and has published several books and circa 100 scientific articles in Russian and other European languages.



Justyna Sawacki is a trained archaeologist working with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Her main field of work is the search for Soviet-era mass graves in Poland. Justyna Sawicka is a member of a special team of experts at IPN that developed an interdisciplinary method to locate and exhume mass graves.



Arne Segelke studied history, art history and Scandinavian studies at the universities of Freiburg, Kiel and Hamburg and holds a doctoral degree from Humboldt-Universität Berlin. He has implemented various projects for DVV International, including a conference and a summer-school on the issue of mass graves.



Roma Sedyka is the director of the Research Center for Memory Cultures at the Jagiellonian University (Krakow) where she lectures on criticism and theory, visual culture and memory studies. She heads a research project on unmemorialised genocide sites and is currently working on a project on non-sites of memory in Central and Eastern Europe. Her main field of research is the interrelation between images, sites and memory.



Łukasz Szleszkowski is a medical doctor and specialist in forensic medicine with 15 years of professional experience. His main interests include classic forensic medicine (particularly post-mortem diagnostics), forensic medical analysis of criminal events and the identification of hitherto unidentified bodies. Since 2008, Łukasz Szleszkowski has worked with the Institute of National Remembrance, taking part in the search for unknown graves from the years 1944-56.

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DVV International
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53225 Bonn
Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)228 97569-0
Fax: +49 (0)228 97569-55
info@dvv-international.de
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