“Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya. The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-96 and 1999-2000 Russo-Chechen Wars.” in ***History and Memory. Studies in Representation of the Past.*** Volume 12, No. 1 Spring/Summer 2000. by Brian Glyn Williams. Univeristy of London.

The collapse of Communism in Eurasia has led to many events that few analysts in the West could have predicted during the Cold War. One of the most improbable of these events was the stunning military victory of the tiny autonomous republic of Chechnya in the 1994-1996 war for independence against the Russian Federation. In a David versus Goliath struggle, bands of Chechen fighters took on the might of the Russian army, often in open warfare, and over and over again defeated or outmaneuvered Moscow's better equipped, larger, professional armies. While the former head of the Russian army, Defense Minister General Pavel Grachev, boasted he could overwhelm the Chechen separatist "bandits" with one air battalion in a matter of hours, the Chechen debacle demonstrated to the world just how far the Russian army's battle effectiveness had deteriorated.

While the Chechens can officially claim to be victors in the first Russo-Chechen war of the 1990s, there was in actuality no winner in this bloody conflict. Scores of Chechen villages were destroyed, the Chechen capital of Grozny was bombed to rubble in the heaviest bombardment in Europe since the bombing of Dresden, tens of thousands of Chechens and Russians living in Chechnya lost their lives, hundreds of thousands more were made refugees, and the economy of the independent statelet of Ichkeria, as Chechnya is now known, lies in utter ruin. Rather than accepting autonomy within the Russian Federation, as the Republic of Tatarstan has, for example, the Chechen people rallied behind such leaders as Dzhokhar Dudaev, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basaev, and chose to fight the might of transcontinental Russia in a bitter struggle for total freedom. The heavy cost of this independence for the Chechen people has been incalculable.

If the destruction from the first post-Soviet invasion was not sufficient, the majority of the tiny Chechen Republic's infrastructure which was rebuilt after 1996 was totally obliterated by Russian bombing raids and artillery bombardments in late 1999 and early 2000 that surpassed even those of the previous war in their intensity. As of spring 2000 the Russian army is

engaged in an even more destructive second invasion of secessionist Chechnya, and few in the Kremlin appear to have learned from the lessons of the first war. Despite the losses in life to their own soldiers (the Russian government admits the loss of approximately 2,000 soldiers thus far in this second campaign, a number seen as rather low by most outside analysts), the Russian government seems determined to avenge its defeat in the previous Chechen War. To stunned Western observers who are watching Russia engage in total warfare against citizens it claims as its own, the second Chechen War has all the logic of an American invasion of Vietnam to avenge its defeat at the hands of the Viet Cong. .

Not surprisingly, the collective amnesia concerning the losses in the first bloody Chechen conflict which prevails in Russia today offers a stark contrast to the Chechens' salient collective memory of previous losses and oppression suffered at the hands of their Russian foes. While much has been written on the Russian government's reasons for launching the second post-Soviet Chechen War (in particular much has been made of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's desire to exploit the war to curry favor with a growing nationalist movement in Russia), very little attention has been paid to Russia's opponents, the Chechens, or their reasons for twice going to war with the Russian army. Blithely described as "terrorist bandit formations" by the Russian press and casually dismissed as an "internal problem" by Western politicians more intent on courting the new Russian leadership than preventing mass human rights abuses, the Chechens as a people have been largely overlooked by those following the recent war. .

Those who do study the Chechens tend to attribute their stubborn resistance to the Russians merely to their centuries-long tradition of warfare with the Russians. While there is a certain validity to claims of this sort, it will be shown here that it is in fact the collective memory of the more recent ethnocide this small people experienced at the hands of the Soviet government in the 1940s and 1950s that has provided the primary catalyst for the militarization of this Muslim society in the postSoviet context.

The Roots of the Russo-Chechen Conflicts of 1994-96 and 1999-Present.

Analysts have partly explained the Chechen leadership's decision to enter into war with Russia in the 1990s by a martial tradition found among this Islamic Caucasian highlander people who have long been known as

implacable enemies of Russia. This enmity with Russia is exacerbated by the fact that the Chechens have a culture that glorifies weapons, with strong codes of honor that often lead to blood vendettas. Indeed, historically, no ethnic group on the north Caucasus flank has had as violent a history of conflict with the Russians as the Chechens. .

During the course of the nineteenth century, Chechen murids (literally "students," holy warriors belonging to Sufi clan-based orders) fought a bloody war agains the encroaching Russian Empire during which many of these highlanders' villages were burnt and their inhabitants slaughtered by the invading Russian forces. The grave sites of slain murids and sheikhs (Sufi religious leaders) continued to be memorials to this struggle and sites of pilgrimage for devout Chechen Muslims through the Soviet period, despite the authorities' attempts to eradicate such "primitive superstitious holdovers." Visiting the site of a murid's tomb was both an affirmation of the Chechens' Islamic identity during a period of enforced Communist atheism and a link to their revered ancestors. The collective memory of Russia's brutal subjugation of the Chechens' ancestors was kept alive during the Soviet period despite the fact that Chechen murids who had fought against Russia were described in official Soviet texts as "fanatical reactionaries" and anti-Soviet elements and "bourgeois bandits." .

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, when Russian Viceroys Vorontsov and Bariatinskii finished the task bequeathed to them by the feared General Yermolov, that the redoubtable Muslim Chechen mountaineers, the indigenous population of this Caucasian region, sullenly surrendered to over a century of rule by the Russians and Soviets. From the fortress of Grozny (which literally means "terrible" or "menacing" in Russian), Yermolov's armies had begun expelling the Chechens from the plains and into the mountains. Yermolov's famous declaration, "I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses, that my word should be for the natives a law more inevitable than death," is still remembered by Chechens today.(1) .

This long memory of conflict with the Russians certainly played an important role in many Chechen fighters' decision to take up weapons and fight against their people's historic "other" during the 1994-1996 Chechen War. However, no event in the bloody history of relations between the Chechens and Russians has had as lasting an impact on the Chechens' collective psyche as their tragic mass deportation from their homeland to

Central Asia toward the end of World War II. On 23 February 1944 mechanized divisions of the NKVD (progenitor to the KGB) surrounded all Chechen villages and brutally herded the entire Chechen population on to cattle cars for transportation from their home republic to the plains of Kazakhstan, the taiga of Siberia and the mountains of Kyrgyzstan, on the official grounds that they had collaborated with the Wehrmacht during the German invasion of the USSR. Thousands of Chechen mountaineers died on the sealed carts due to lack of water and food, poor sanitary conditions and trauma, and thousands more died in their inhospitable places of resettlement.

For twelve years the scattered Chechens languished as a non-nation far from their Caucasian homeland. It was only with the death of Stalin in 1953 and the rise to power of the reformist Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev that the Chechen people was permitted to return to the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), which they shared with their ethno-linguistic kin, the Ingush (who had also been deported). Although the deportations were carried out by the Soviet government, and neither Stalin nor NKVD chief Lavrentii Beriia was Russian, this distinction was lost on the Chechens who saw the deportation as the "final solution" to their years of determined resistance to Russian rule. In the Chechen collective memory of the deportation, it was the Russians who carried out this atrocity.(2)

The collective memory of this event has shaped Chechen identity to this day, and pundits who analyze the Chechen leadership's relations with neighboring peoples and territories (such as the newly independent Republic of Georgia, the related Ingush, the partly Christian Ossetians, Moscow and, most recently, the multi-ethnic republic of Dagestan in the Russian Federation) must take this factor into consideration when predicting the Chechens' political and military actions. Interestingly, today few in the West are aware of the salient nature of this tragic event in forging contemporary Chechen society and its role in shaping this people's collective actions. An analysis of the deportation and the ways in which Chechen ethno-national entrepreneurs have exploited this traumatic event will provide a unique case study of the ways in which victimized communities are shaped in a political, cultural and social sense by memories of communal tragedy. It will also demonstrate the ways in which the memorialization of a people's tragedy can politically and militarily mobilize threatened populations.(3)

THE DEPORTATION AS CONTESTED HISTORY.

As in much of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, nations and ethnic groups of the Caucasus have competing ethno-national histories. The Russian population of the northern Caucasus still tends to look upon the Chechens as traitors to the Soviet homeland during World War II, and many believe that the charges leveled against this people of mass treason against the USSR during the Nazi invasion were valid. The official decree announcing the abolition of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR (and the nearby Crimean ASSR) published after the deportation stated:

During the Great Patriotic War ... many Chechens and Crimean Tatars, at the instigation of German agents joined volunteer units organized by the Germans and together with German troops engaged in armed struggle against units of the Red Army.... Meanwhile the main mass of the population of the Chechen-Ingush and Crimean ASSRs took no counteraction against these betrayers of the Fatherland.(4)

There is some historical basis for the charges of collaboration. Several thousand Chechens fighting in the Red Army were captured by the Germans and formed into hiwi (support) units in the Wehrmacht. In addition, some Chechens had been in revolt prior to the invasion in reaction to Stalin's policies of collectivization. These were, however, the exception, and thousands of Chechens loyally fought for the Soviet homeland in the Red Army during the German invasion. Between 18,000 and 40,000 Chechens were mobilized to fight in the Soviet ranks and many Chechens received medals and promotions for their heroism during the war.(5) The German army only invaded the Chechen region of Malgobek, and most of Chechnya lay far beyond the reach of the Nazi invaders. .

The Chechens, of course, have a countermemory of the events surrounding the deportation, which is radically different from the official Soviet version. Chechens are brought up on ritualized narratives of this tragic event. In the tales of "the Deportation" the role of Chechen collaborators with the Nazis is usually downplayed, Stalin's treachery in surprising the loyal Chechens and deporting them is stressed, and the brutality of the actual deportation and resettlement in Central Asia is recounted. Lost family members, such as an uncle who was shot for moving too slowly toward collection points, a grandmother who died of a heart attack on the trains to Central Asia, or a cousin who died on the frozen steppes of Kazakhstan, are commemorated at

this time. The older generation that survived the deportation became in effect a living memorial to this people's communal tragedy and a repository of memories and grievances which were handed down to new generations. Almost all Chechens have a personal link to someone who died during the deportation and exile of their people. This is underlined by the common Chechen axiom, "Nothing is forgotten, nothing will be forgotten," which captures this people's determination to keep the memory of the deportation alive.

There were, of course, no public outlets for commemorating their national tragedy during the Soviet era. Although the charges of mass treason against the Chechens were dropped in 1956, allowing for their repatriation, the Soviet government did not compensate the victims of the deportation or allow open commemoration of this "irregularity" in Socialist planning. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 there has, however, been a renaissance of interest in the deportation and exile period. An organization known as the Confederation of Repressed Peoples was formed in 1990 to unite those nations deported by Stalin. Newspaper articles in Chechnya began, for the first time, to bring to light the horrors of the deportation, conferences were held on this event, and books began to be published in both Russian and Chechen languages on this formerly taboo subject.

After 1991, ethnic groups in the Russian Federation such as the Buryats, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, North Siberian minorities (in particular the Evenks), Ingush., Yakuts and Chechens began to express their identities and explore long-forbidden chapters in their Soviet past. In many cases, these peoples' history of victimization during the Soviet period led to anti-Russian sentiments. The Russian population scattered throughout the ethnically based republics and autonomous territorial units within Russia and those who suddenly found themselves beyond Russia's borders in the Near Abroad (Blizhnee zarubezh'e, i.e. newly independent former Soviet republics) reacted to this development with increasing uneasiness. Most Russians had identified with the Soviet state and were prone to see local, non-Slavic nationalisms in a negative light. Russian lawmakers and officials in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic (there were approximately 300,000 Russians and close to a million Chechens and Ingush in Chechnya prior to the recent war) tended to side with the central authorities in Moscow while Chechen leaders began to espouse the cause of greater independence. In this environment the Chechens' increasing emphasis on commemorating the deportation had both political and symbolic importance for Chechnya's

relations with the post-Soviet Russian Federation of President Vladimir Putin.

THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE DEPORTATION

One of the most interesting works to appear in Russia on the deportations in the early 1990s was a collection of firsthand accounts by victims entitled *Tak eto Bylo* (Thus it Was).(6) As the generation that survived the deportation begins to die out, the accounts found in this popular work are an invaluable source of information on this event which has still not been fully examined by scholars in Russia or the West. These accounts also provide insight into the ways in which the transgenerational stories of the deportation shaped the collective memory of whole generations that had not actually experienced this communal tragedy themselves. .

The ritualized deportation narratives usually begin with an account of the NKVD soldiers' arrival in Chechnya in February 1944 to a hospitable welcome from the "trusting" Chechens. While there were rumors that other nationalities had been deported previously, few suspected that an operation was underway to expel the Chechen nation from its natal land. A Chechen account states "The local inhabitants received the soldiers and officers with Caucasian hospitality, not suspecting that in several months these very soldiers would kill many of them." (7) .

Indeed, the NKVD began what has been described as Operation Mountaineer in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR secretly for fear of letting the doomed population know of its intended fate. Attempts were made to lure the Chechen and Ingush populations into a false sense of security on the eve of the deportation according to NKVD chief Beriia's orders.(8) With his troops in place, Beriia sent a telegram to Stalin which proudly proclaimed: "I believe that the operation for the expulsion of the Chechens and Ingush will be carried out smoothly."(9) .

In February 1944 as many as 100,000 soldiers and an entire tank division took part in the massive operation to occupy all Chechen villages. On 23 February 1944, the Soviet holiday known as Red Army Day (and now a national day of mourning in Chechnya), all Chechens were ordered to meet in public to take part in this celebration. As the Chechens gathered in village squares a decree was read announcing that, as "traitors to the Soviet

homeland," the entire Chechen people, men, women and children, was to be deported to Central Asia. It should be noted that the diversion of 180 trains and tens of thousands of military personnel from the front hindered Soviet military effectiveness during the Red Army offensive of 1944. The transportation of half a million people over thousands of kilometers required considerable logistics and planning and appears to have been carried out as a military operation (those in charge of the deportation received military medals in recognition of their accomplishments). .

An account in the Tak eto bylo collection captures the horror of the deportation process and brings this tragedy to life for new generations:

> Early in the morning of 23 February 1944, on the squares and on the outskirts of the village in the mountains, [the mountaineers] were aroused by automatics and machine guns; the order of the State Committee of the District was announced, everyone was searched out and directed to the train station. Then began the second part of the "scenario," soldiers entered all doors, armed with automatics, led by an officer or sergeant who gave them 10-15 minutes to expel the elderly, children and women from their homes, the wounded were tossed out of medical stations. Anyone who resisted was shot! Anyone who attempted to escape was shot! Anyone who misunderstood the order was shot! [The deportation decree] had been given in Russian and manydid not speak Russian.... On the tableland of Chechnya, within severalhours, hundreds of people were gunned down, men, women, children and old people.(10)

The Chechens' narratives recall with particular horror a massacre that occurred in the village of Khaibakh during the deportation. One Chechen account states:

> I was born in 1912 in the village of Motskara, in the Galanchosk region. Now I live in Gekhi-Uch. I confirm that my family, and my relatives, 19 in number, children, women and old people, were shot and burned in Khaibakh by soldiers....
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> > My brother Alimkhojaev Salambek ... was shot as he walked along the road. His wife is still living, her name is Besiila ... To this day she preserves the braid of her sister, Partakhi. Partakhi, together with her children, was shot and burned in Khaibakh.(11)

The NKVD account of the slaughter at Khaibakh simply states: "In view of the impossibility of transportation and the necessity of fulfilling on schedule the goals of Operation `Mountaineer,' it was necessary to liquidate more than 700 inhabitants of the village of [Khaibakh]."(12) In other villages, John Dunlop writes, "people were drowned, shot or killed with hand grenades."(13) The possessions of the deported peoples, from household items to cattle and farming equipment, were confiscated by the NKVD agents involved in the deportation, which gave these military units added incentive to prevent deportees from bringing their possessions with them to their places of exile. After the mountain auls (villages) had been emptied, they were systematically burned by NKVD troops; an eyewitness recalled: "For days one could see auls burning in the mountains."(14)

The deportation narratives place special emphasis on the horror of the subsequent deportation process. Some 387,229 Chechens and 91,250 Ingush who shared the Chechen-Ingush ASSR with the Chechens were herded at gun point on to cattle cars known as "echelons" for deportation to Siberia and Central Asia.(15) Another 30,000 Chechens who lived across the border from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in the neighboring regions of western Dagestan (the Aukh District) were caught up by Beriia and deported from this republic as well. In addition, NKVD units began a hunt for Chechens in other republics, and hundreds of Chechens living in Azerbaijan, the Krasnodar and Rostov provinces in Russia proper and Georgia were caught in the net and deported.(16) Small bands of Chechens in the mountains were able to avoid the deportation and to carry out anti-Soviet hit-and-run attacks for several years after the deportation, but for the most part there was no escape for this doomed nationality who were identified by ethnicity in their internal passports. .

In the Chechen narratives, most elderly victims of the deportation remember with bitter irony that they were transported to train depots on Lend Lease Studebakers provided to the USSR by the USA. Once at the railheads the Chechens were forced into hundreds of cattle cars whose only modification for human occupation was a pipe placed in the floor for a toilet. Mark Taplin writes that "[t]he cattle cars set aside for Beria's ugly errand had already been used for his earlier deportations; they were caked in old feces, and smeared in dried blood and urine. With practice the NKVD had perfected these sinister operations to a ruthless science."(17) This "removal" was carried out with a cold efficiency that resembled the deportation of Jews to death camps in Poland and Germany. The deportation of the Chechens and

other small Soviet nations was, in effect, total ethnic cleansing, and Stalin in fact used the word ochistit' (to cleanse) in his orders to Beriia.(18)

THE EXILE PERIOD IN SIBERIA AND CENTRAL ASIA (1944-1957)

The Chechens were sealed in the guarded carts for two to three weeks as the trains made their way across the Soviet Union to eastern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Siberia. All Chechen families have tales of losses suffered on the trains to exile that are commemorated in the deportation narratives passed on from generation to generation. The following account is representative of this tradition. "From cold and the dirt they began to fall ill. The people were mowed down by typhus, they were not able to bury those who died. On the rare stops on the empty steppes, soldiers walked through the wagon taking off bodies."(19) Another account recalls: "The train again halted at a half-way station on the steppe, the door was opened. From the neighboring car a shout reached us. Who had died? It turned out to be a pregnant woman, but the baby died."(20) Most accounts stress that the NKVD troops attempted to fit as many deportees as possible to a rail cart to maximize efficiency, and deportees have horror tales of being piled on top of one another for the journey.(21) This situation led to a breakdown of proper sanitation on the sealed train cars, and typhus broke out among the Chechens and carried away many deportees, with the young and elderly being the most vulnerable.(22)

Once in Central Asia (most deportees were channeled through Alma Ata, the capital of the Kazakh SSR) 239,768 Chechens were deposited in camps in Kazakhstan and 70,997 in Kyrgyzstan with the rest being scattered throughout Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan and the Yakut ASSR in Siberia.(23) Many Chechens were also sent to labor camps in Siberia. The Chechen highlanders had considerable difficulty in adapting to the climate and conditions in their places of exile and many died from malaria, typhus, intestinal problems and exposure related to their poor housing in barracks, dugouts and sheds. The majority of deportees ended up in spetsposelenets (special settler) camps on the barren Kazakh steppe. A Chechen survivor of the deportation claims: "In the driving snow storms and snowy blizzards, in the 40-degree frost, on the endless steppe, the Chechens and Ingush fell. The `special settlers' had been directed to a special regime of settlement. In the first months alone more than 70,000 people died."(24) .

Soviet sources support the Chechens' claim to a high mortality rate and state that between 1944 and 1948 approximately 24 perecent of the Chechen, Ingush, Karachai and Balkar deportees in Kazakhstan died.(25) Interestingly enough, perhaps as a result of the trauma of deportation, the Chechens' birthrate was one of the highest in the USSR; indeed, the exiled Chechens claim to have deliberately increased their birthrate to keep their nation alive. While the other deported nations all suffered considerable losses in demographic terms, the number of Chechens who returned to their homeland after their release from exile in 1956-1957 was almost as high as that deported. During the exile period the Chechens appear to have exercised a communal desire to "continue the people," as they describe it.

In the absence of the Chechens and Ingush their autonomous republic was liquidated and converted into the Grozny Oblast (Region). In addition, much of the territory in the southern regions of the disbanded Chechen-Ingush ASSR was granted to Stalin's native republic of Georgia. Tens of thousands of Russians and smaller numbers of Ossetians (a neighboring, predominantly Christian Caucasian people), Avars and Dargins (Muslim peoples living in the Dagestan ASSR) were settled in the Chechens' abandoned villages and homes. These settlers appear to have attempted to erase any memory of the previous inhabitants' lives there in order to legitimize their own claims to these houses and lands.

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In addition, Stalin used the vast resources at his disposal to cleanse this territory of many traces of the Chechens' inhabitation of the region. Mosques were demolished, literature in the Chechen language burned, signs in Chechen destroyed and, most importantly, the revered graveyards of the Chechens were plowed over. The expunging of the memory of the Chechens extended to town and topographical names, and many ancient Chechen place names were Russified. The Chechen town of Urus Martan became Krasnoarmeiskii (Red Army), Achkhoi Martan became Novosel'skii (New Village), Shali became Mezhdurechenskii (Between Rivers), etc. For all intents and purposes, the Chechens, like the other deported Soviet peoples such as the Ingush, Kalmyks, Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Karachais and Balkars, had been eradicated from the USSR's ethnic map. As John Dunlop states, "the Chechen-Ingush ASSR simply disappeared into a memory hole."(26) .

The Chechens speak with revulsion of their humiliating years spent in the spetskamandantskii (special commandant) regime. The Chechens were brutalized by camp commanders and used as a helot class to do hard labor throughout the factories and farms of their places of exile. Robert Conquest reports that the Soviet government relied on the deported peoples to carry out heavy construction, such as the building of railroads in Siberia.(27) The deportation years fundamentally changed the Chechens' identity in many ways. Many of the changes were negative. For example, for over a decade most Chechen children were deprived of an education and literacy levels plummeted. Other changes such as the rise of a new sense of unity among this clan-based people (who had not been nationally developed prior to the deportation) were positive. One change of considerable importance was the fact that Sufi (mystic) Islam began to play a much more prevalent role in Chechen society during the exile period. Sufi tariqats (brotherhoods) such as the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya provided the Chechens with paths for maintaining their collective identity and offering resistance to the authorities. While the Soviets aimed at creating an atheist Homo Sovieticus, the exile experience, ironically enough, appears to have actually deepened the Chechens' sense of religiosity and ethnicity. Not surprisingly, this "underground Islam" was anti-Russian and anti-Soviet. Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush wrote of the Chechens that "since the deportation of the 1940s, it is the supra-national awareness of belonging to the Muslim Umma [ecumenical community of believers] which predominates. Nationalism, based on the holy war tradition and on undisguised hatred of the Russians is extremely xenophobic."(28)

The Chechens grew to have a strong distrust of the Soviet system, which is not surprising given their experience during the exile. During this period, they could not leave their special settlement areas to search out lost family members and friends. Those who did were sentenced to forced-labor camps for five years. Thousands of the obstreperous Chechens and Ingush (the two deported nations that appear to have been most active in resisting their exile) were sentenced to hard-labor camps in Siberia for breaking the special settlement regime. While most of the deported nations accepted their exile with stunned submission, the Chechens resisted on several occasions.29 In his account of the massive network of Soviet prison camps, The Gulag Archipelago, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote of the Chechens: "Only one nation refused to accept the psychology of submission." And this applied "not to individuals, nor to insurgents, but to the nation as a whole ... no Chechen ever tried to be of service or to please the authorities. Their attitude

towards them was proud and even hostile."(30)

RECONSTRUCTING THE CHECHEN NATION AFTER EXILE

With the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent reversal of many of his policies, the Chechens and Ingush began a mass return movement to their lost homeland. In 1956 Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, issued a decree exculpating the Chechens on the charges of mass treason, and by 1957 as many as 400,000 Chechens and Ingush began to pour into their former homeland.(31) The Chechens and Ingush had in fact begun to leave their places of exile and had been filtering into their former lands prior to the decree, suggesting that Khrushchev may have been reacting to events from below.

Although the newly freed Chechens were initially forbidden to return to their native land, they ignored this restriction and in 1957, by sheer numbers, overwhelmed local authorities (predominately Russians) attempting to prevent their return. The head of the Grozny Oblast, A. I. Iakovlev, appears to have been vehemently opposed to the Chechens' return and to have exerted considerable effort to prevent their repatriation. In addition, the Soviet authorities forced returning Chechens to sign documents relinquishing their claims to their former possessions in Chechnya. Indeed, many of the Chechens' ancient mountain villages had been destroyed in 1944, and the Soviet authorities attempted to prevent the Chechens from returning to the mountains where they were harder to control, preferring instead to settle them in sovkhozes (state farms) and kolkhozes (collective farms) located in the northern lowlands of Chechnya. .

As hundreds of thousands of Chechens returned to their homeland on trains and buses, non-Chechens complained of the stench created by the Chechens' dead as they transported the bones of loved ones who had died in exile back to their ancestral lands.(32) The Chechens have many narratives describing the symbolic importance of burying their dead in the ancestral graveyards of their homeland and restoring cemeteries destroyed by new settlers in their absence. The destruction of Chechen graves was considered by the Chechens to be a supreme act of sacrilege. The efforts to eradicate the very memory of their forebears' existence on this land certainly exacerbated tensions between the Chechen repatriates and those living in their former villages and even in their former houses. According to one account,

> When we came back in 1958, all the villages were empty or Russian-occupied....
>
> In the old cemetery, there was a small shrine, the mausoleum of a saint. The new settlers destroyed it, and dug two meters into the ground underneath it looking for treasure. They destroyed all the graves....
>
> The Russians began to leave as soon as we came back. They seemed to be afraid of us, and perhaps they even had a bad conscience.(33)

There were many examples of clashes between the returning Chechen Muslims and the Slavs who had settled in their villages during their twelve-year absence. Fighting in Grozny between Chechen-Ingush returnees and local Russians (which went unreported in the West) are described by Nekrich as "one of the worst racial clashes in the Soviet Union since the end of the war." Local Russian authorities passed a resolution calling for the expulsion of the Chechens and Ingush from the region, and there was a real fear among the repatriates that they would be once again deported from their homeland.(34) While the returning Chechens sought rehabilitation, Soviet history books still continued to portray them as traitors to the homeland during World War II. The decree exonerating the Chechens from the charges of treason during the war was never widely published in the USSR, and many Soviet citizens remained unaware that the Chechens had been absolved of these accusations. .

At this time there were muted displays of the Chechens' communal counterhistory which painted the Soviet state as the continuer of the Russian Empire's brutal treatment of the Chechens. A large statue of General Yermolov in Grozny, which had been removed during the early Soviet period, had been reinstated after the deportation by the local administration. After 1956 Chechens made several attempts to bomb this statue which symbolized their humiliation at the hands of the Russians. The fact that this statue of the brutal Russian conqueror of Chechnya remained in Grozny throughout the Soviet period (it was removed only in 1989) testifies to the Russian-dominated local Communist administration's insensitivity to the Chechen population who equated Yermolov with Stalin.(35) Similarly, Chechen sources claim that Chechens regularly vandalized a statue of Stalin that stood in Grozny during this period.(36) In addition, the Sufi brotherhoods continued to offer a vehicle for countermemory for the Chechen people. Soviet press reports from the 1950s speak of scores of trials

against Sufi adherents among the Chechens who were often executed for "banditry."(37)

By the 1960s relations between the local Russian administration and the returning Chechens had stabilized but the repatriates actively kept the memory of the deportation and terrible years spent in exile alive in the minds of new generations. This type of commemoration of a "chosen trauma" was first analyzed by Vamik Volkhan and has been applied to a variety of displaced or victimized communities.(38) In essence, Volkhan has shown that when a group cannot communally mourn or reverse a traumatic event, overcome the humiliation of this victimization or retaliate for it, it passes on this task to the next generation. .

In the process of passing on transgenerational stories of the "chosen trauma" there is a certain mythologizing of the event as it becomes a part of a people's collective memory. Many Chechens now claim that half of their nation died during the deportation and exile, and stories passed on from one generation to another of mass slaughter, "genocide" and the deaths of "hundreds of thousands" of Chechens have become part of the Chechen national mythology.(39) According to one account of the 1994-1996 Chechen conflict, "[t]he exile in Central Asia left deep wounds and made a new generation of Chechens, whose grandparents had died fifty years before, that much more prepared to go to the edge in conflict with Russia."(40) Groups with a collective memory of past victimization certainly respond to real or perceived threats to their community differently from those who have not experienced such traumas. The post-Holocaust Jews of Israel are the most obvious example of a community that has been shaped by memories of its tragic history, but the Palestinians' communal memory has been shaped in similar ways by the tragedy of al-naqba (the disaster), the expulsion and flight of around 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, while today's Armenians are also deeply affected by their communal memory of genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. Thus, after the slaughter of Armenians by Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait in February 1988, just prior to the outbreak of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, one Armenian claimed that "Sumgait exacerbated everything ... the genocide of 1915 is always in front of our eyes, a reason for our seriousness. The road toward massacre is always a possibility."(41)

The maintenance of the communal memory of a "chosen trauma" serves the purpose of instilling in new generations a determination to prevent this event

from being repeated in the future and impacts the actions of future generations. Statistics such as the number of six million Jews killed in the Holocaust for the Jews, or dates such as the year 1915 for Armenians, become powerful evocative symbols. Forgetting the trauma becomes an act of betrayal to the community. As a typical Chechen song evoking the deportation insists:

> Are we really supposed to forget that morning? Are we really supposed to forget that night? We did not forget our home. And that dark day for us, The courtyard's roar with the fighting of dogs. Children and the elderly cry, How many are no longer living on the land? We will never forget!(42)

An English journalist who lived with the Chechens during the recent war reported: "The scar is deep, not only on the generation which survived the train journey and the generation born in exile, but on their descendants. Because this was punishment based on race, the deportations have become part of the national identity of the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Balkars."(43)

THE MEMORY OF THE DEPORTATION IN THE POST-SOVIET CONTEXT

The determination of the deported nations to keep the memory of their victimhood alive has shaped these ethnic groups' relations with the neighboring Caucasian peoples. Stalin's legacy lives on today in dozens of ethnic time-bombs in the Caucasus and Crimea brought about by his attempts at mass ethnocide. Crimean Tatars "returning" to their peninsular homeland (never seen by most who grew up in Central Asia) have had numerous clashes with the Russians who settled in their villages and homes during their forty-five-year exile; the Meskhetian Turks have been driven from their place of exile by Uzbek pogroms in 1989 and are fighting to return to their homeland in Georgia; the Kalmyks have been agitating for the return of territory taken from their autonomous republic and given to the neighboring Astrakhan Region during their exile; the Balkars want to separate from the neighboring peoples with whom they share the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic; and the Chechens and Ingush have clashed with neighboring people who have settled in and claimed lands they possessed prior to the deportations. .

One of the first clashes resulting from the changes made during the exile period involved Chechens whose home territory lay not in Chechnya proper but across the border in the neighboring republic of Dagestan. Thirty thousand Chechens from the Dagestan ASSR (known as Akkin Chechens), bordering the Chechen-Ingush Republic to the east, had been caught up by Beriia's forces and deported from their homeland, known as the Aukh District, during the 1944 deportation.(44) In their absence, Dagestani authorities had settled their farms and villages with members of a different nationality, the Laks, and renamed the territory the Novolakskii Raion (New Lak District). Returning Chechens clashed with the Laks living in their homes in 1957 and the Laks fought back. Although the Chechens have, since Perestroika, been allowed back to this region, this has created a ripple effect as the Laks have now been removed to Kumyk-inhabited land near the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala, which has caused new interethnic tension in this area lacking in land resources.(45) .

Although the authorities in Dagestan have allowed the Chechens to have control of their ancestral cemeteries, many Chechens to this day cannot obtain propisky (official residential permits) to settle in their former villages.(46) It should also be noted that the region around the Dagestani city of Kizil Yar, an area with a considerable Chechen population, had belonged to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR prior to the deportation, and many Chechens in this region have manifested a desire to have this area returned to Chechnya. In light of this communal grievance among the Akkin Chechens, it is not surprising that the Chechens of this region plumbed the limits of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost' by erecting the first monument to the deportation in the USSR in February 1989 in the village of Gacha Ika.(47) .

The tension in the region was exacerbated when Chechnya declared itself independent from Russia in 1991 under Dzhokhar Dudaev, who had himself grown up in exile in Central Asia. Many Akkin Chechens from this border region in Dagestan joined the Chechen National Guard organized by Dudaev's supporters, and the Chechen leadership threatened to annex the lands of the Akkin Chechens from Dagestan. This western border region remains perhaps the most volatile region in Dagestan to this day. In the fall of 1999 Chechens from western Dagestan (in particular the Khasavyurt District) united with two Chechen war leaders, Shamil Basaev and Emir Khattab, in attacking Russian troops in the region. This operation, which was launched in conjunction with an Islamist rebellion in several

neighboring villages, was repulsed only with considerable losses to Russian Internal Ministry troops. Most recently, this incursion has been used as an excuse for a second Russian military intervention in Chechnya.

COMMEMORATIONS OF THE DEPORTATION IN POST-SOVIET CHECHNYA

Throughout the Soviet period the local Communist regime in Checheno-Ingushetia (headed by a Russian despite the fact that Chechens and Ingush made up the overwhelming majority of the republic's population) had attempted to legitimize the 1944 deportations. This continued well into the glasnost' period; as late as 1988 an article appeared in the All-Union journal Kommunist which proclaimed that during the Great Patriotic War

> the real face of anti-Soviet elements was unmasked.... Traitors and enemies of the Soviet authorities ... formed terrorist gangs, committed acts of sabotage and murdered Party and Soviet activists.... Their dirty crimes were among the causes of the tragedy which befell the Chechens and Ingush--their mass expulsion from their homeland.(48)

Another source argued that "Even in the period of glasnost' and denunciation of Stalinism, people who claimed to be internationalists wrote incredible nonsense about the Chechens and Ingush. Stalin, who is accused of all sins, be they his own or those of others, is loudly justified for deporting the North Caucasians."(49)

A signal that the climate was beginning to change was given on 24 November 1989 when the Soviet newspapers Izvestiia and Pravda ran articles calling the expulsion of the Chechens and other punished peoples from their homelands "a barbaric act on the part of the Stalinist regime" and declared that "[t]he USSR Supreme Soviet considers it necessary to take the relevant legislative steps for the unconditional restoration of the rights of all Soviet citizens subjected to persecution."(50) In June 1990 Soviet historian Nikolai Fedorovich Bugai published a groundbreaking article in the prestigious journal Voprosy Istorii (Questions of history) entitled "The Truth about the Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples." Using previously inaccessible KGB sources that had just begun to be declassified in the glasnost' period, Bugai pointed out that thousands of Chechens and Ingush had served in the Red Army (many receiving medals and high ranks) and

that the deportation of this people, including unarmed civilians, children, women and the elderly, had been a gross perversion of Leninist national politics. For the first time he exposed the harsh conditions in the special settlement camps and the callous attitudes of Stalin and Beriia concerning the deportation of almost two million members of the small nations of the Caucasus, Crimea and Volga. The publication of these declassified works gave many survivors of the deportation and their descendants a bone-chilling account of the methodical planning that had been invested in the physical destruction of as many as a quarter of the Chechen people.

In the summer of 1991, in the wake of the failed coup against Gorbachev, the Chechen parliament began calls for increasing independence. As pronouncements from Chechnya became bolder, Chechen legislators made a decision to remove the massive statue of Lenin dominating Grozny's central square. As chanting crowds gathered, the statue was toppled, dragged through the streets of Grozny and dumped in the nearby Sunzha River. Five years later Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (successor to Dzhokhar Dudaev who was killed during the 1994-1996 war) described the impact of this event on the Chechen people as having had "the effect of a bomb." Yandarbiev made it clear that he considered the deportation of the Chechens to have been "moral-psychological and spiritual genocide," and the toppling of Lenin's statue to have been a symbolic measure of retaliation against the despised Soviet regime.(51) In another symbolic gesture, the main square in Grozny airport was renamed Mansur Square in honor of the anti-Russian Chechen war leader of the earn nineteenth century.

Following Chechnya's subsequent declaration of independence from the Russian Federation on 2 November 1991, discussion of the deportation became even more widespread in Chechnya. Tensions rose in 1992 and 1993 as Soviet President Boris Yeltsin threatened to invade the republic and overthrow its pro-independence leadership. Chechnya became an armed camp at this time as Chechen bands raided local Soviet army depots and created heavily armed local militias equipped with armored personnel carriers, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, artillery, several tanks and even a small air force. The encircled republic's people developed a siege mentality as a result of a Russian economic embargo and several Russian-sponsored coup attempts, and talk of the deportation came to have new bearing on contemporary political events within the republic. As the situation grew tense, the Chechens commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the deportation in February 1994 with public prayers, rallies and chants of

"Nothing is forgotten! Nothing will be forgotten." The national mood was reflected in a well-known poem by Chechen national poet Ismail Kerimov published at this time, which evokes the 1944 massacre in the village of Khaibakh (comparing it to the widely known massacre at Katyn in the Ukraine):

I ache,
I am thousands.
Thousands of tears
Shed under the roar of the wheels in February of 1944,
I am a sea.

I am hundreds,
I am thousands of bodies collected in obscure stations.
I am a tombstone, a monument,
I am the despair of shattered mothers,
With frozen prayers.

I am the sky,
I am Khaibakh, Katyn and the GULAG,
The bloody throne of a dictator,
I am glasnost',
I am the heart of a poet, nature, song.
A growing soreness in the throat,
I am a voice and I command you
"Remember!"(52)

A monument to the deportation erected at this time in the center of Grozny was symbolically made up of tombstones from cemeteries destroyed in 1944. On the walls surrounding the monument tablets were mounted telling how many Chechens the NKVD had slaughtered in which villages during the deportation. In the center was an open stone Qur'an with a huge fist raising a sword and an inscription that read: "We will not weep, we will not weaken, we will not forget."(53) Such monuments have also been erected by other deported peoples. The monument constructed by the Karachai outside of the capital city of the Karachai-Cherkess Autonomous Republic consists of a statue of a woman with a child in front of a panorama depicting Karachai men fighting against the Nazis in the Red Army. The Kalmyks, Balkars, and Ingush also have monuments to the deportation in their republics.

These monuments to a tragedy that could previously not even be spoken of in public have enormous psychological significance to the peoples involved. Chechen leaders such as Dzhokhar Dudaev, who initially were not popular in much of Chechnya, have used these monuments to politically mobilize and gain the support of many Chechens who opposed confrontation with Russia. As the Russian army began to move into Chechnya in December 1994, a year which had particular significance as the fiftieth anniversary of the deportation, an observer noted that "Moscow's errors gave Mr. Dudayev the opportunity to exploit the Chechen population's deep-seated fears. He repeatedly claimed that Russia would once again deport the Chechens, thereby helping to rally the local population behind him."(54) Another source pointed out that Dudaev had told his people that the deportation of 1944 invalidated Russian rule over the Chechen people on moral grounds and gave them the right to fight against Russian troops fifty years later.(55)

While Russian commanders anticipated a quick victory over the Chechen bands, they soon encountered a major military defeat in the capital city of Grozny as an entire military column of tanks and armored personnel carriers was destroyed by determined Chechen street-fighting units in December and January 1995. Small bands of Chechen street fighters annilhilated the first column of the Russian invading force with a loss of hundreds of Russian lives.(56) As the larger Russian forces received reinforcements during the battle for Grozny, the Russians fired their tanks from the destroyed memorial to the deportation in a calculated insult against the Chechen people. Once again Chechen tombstones were symbolically desecrated by Russian soldiers who on this occasion used them to construct toilets. By February 1995 the Chechen fighters had been forced out of Grozny after bloody street fighting and the Chechens began a determined resistance from villages in the Caucasus foothills to the south. A Western observer writing at the time noted that "poorly executed and harsh Russian attacks only increased Chechen resistance, evoking memories of earlier repression."(57) As the Russian army rampaged through the plains of Chechnya (which make up almost 80 percent of the republic's territory), their indiscriminate attacks on Chechen villages rekindled old memories of the deportation and fulfilled Dudaev's prophecy of another "genocide" against the Chechen people.

It was only when the villages of the Chechen plain and foothills were systematically obliterated with aerial bombardments and devastating missile strikes that the beleaguered Chechen fighters retreated to the mountains.

Here they fought on throughout 1995 and into 1996, surprising the West with their determination to resist the much larger Russian forces. Moscow soon discovered it was fighting not a few divided bands but an entire people, men, women and children, who either supplied the Chechen fighters or fought themselves. One witness to the Chechens' desperate resistance against much larger Russian units remarked that "[i]t cannot be excluded that the Chechen population has every reason to believe that if their resistance fails, they face mass deportation as they did in 1944, or something even worse."(55) Other observers have agreed with this assessment, and a Russian source has stated that many Chechens compared the invasion of 1994-1996 to the 1944 deportation.(59) Indeed, a Chechen source has attributed "the stubborn military and nonmilitary opposition of the Chechens" to "the deportation `syndrome' of 1944 [that] could be found in the historical and psychological traits of the Chechen people."(60) .

In summer 1995, at the height of the Chechen War, Russia celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II with great fanfare and visits by Western political leaders to Moscow. As Russia commemorated its victory over Nazism, the contrast between the victorious Red Army entering Berlin and the Russian army launching increasingly senseless attacks on its own citizens in the Chechen Republic was made glaringly obvious in critical reports appearing in Russian newspapers.(61)

For the Chechens there was no cause to celebrate a war in which their people had been deported as "traitors to the homeland." They continued to fight even as the world, ignoring their plight, rejoiced in the end of another war fifty years earlier. On a couple of occasions, Chechen field commanders such as Shamil Basaev actually succeeded in launching guerrilla strikes into Russia proper. On 14 June 1995 Basaev led a Chechen unit deep into the neighboring Russian province of Stavropol and raided the town of Budennovsk, taking hundreds hostage in the process. More than 200 people were killed in the city as Russian security forces tried unsuccessfully to free the hostages, and Basaev and his unit were finally allowed to return to Chechnya with their hostages acting as shields.(62) .

The war was finally brought to a halt in August 1996 only after Chechen forces successfully launched a surprise attack on Russian-occupied Grozny and trapped as many as 18,000 Russian soldiers in the city. Yeltsin was forced to reluctantly agree to peace talks with the Chechens which led to the

withdrawal of Russian forces from the devastated republic in November 1996.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE CHECHEN WAR

The memory of the 1994-1996 Russian invasion of Chechnya will, like the collective memory of the deportation, shape this people's culture, their views of themselves and of their neighbors for generations to come. Monuments to this war were quickly constructed by the Chechens. One of the most visited memorials is a simple stone monument to Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudaev on the spot where he was killed by a Russian bomber that homed in on his communication signal while he was talking on a portable radio. The city of Grozny, still a wasteland of rubble, destroyed factories and mass graves, is itself a monument to the war and has been renamed Djohar in honor of the slain leader. One of the Chechen government's first moves following the Russian withdrawal was to rebuild the destroyed monument to the deportation in Grozny. .

While this war was largely overlooked in the West (US President Clinton and other Western leaders were loath to weaken relatively pro-Western Yeltsin with criticism on the issue prior to Russian elections), its effects will certainly live on in the bombed-out mountain auls and lowland villages of Chechnya for generations to come. Just as the present generation was raised on stories of "the Deportation," new generations will recall the Russian invasion of 1994-1996 and the more recent invasion of 1999. New monuments to Dudaev and gazis (holy warriors) who sacrificed their lives in war against Russia have been erected throughout Chechnya. Besides revered gravestones of the saint-murids who died fighting against the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, and monuments to the deportation, there are now thousands of new graves festooned with green cloth covered with Arabic prayers commemorating the loss of those warriors who died fighting against their people's historic enemy. These graves act as communal monuments and reminders to the Chechens of the suffering they have endured at the hands of their great neighbor to the north, Russia.

The Chechen national memory of the war is of course diametrically opposed to that of the Russians. While the Chechens commemorate their slain "martyrs" and memorialize key battles in their struggle for independence, Russia appears to have developed collective amnesia concerning the war and no effort has been made to memorialize the Russians killed in this conflict.

Perhaps the most notable example of the two people's different interpretations of the war came on 15 June 1999, when the Chechen Republic celebrated the fifth anniversary of Basaev's raid on the Russian town of Budennovsk. The inhabitants of Budennovsk, however, commemorated the occasion with a day of mourning for the more than 200 victims of that raid. In what could be construed as a deliberate insult to the Russian government, many members of Basaev's unit (all of whom are listed as "terrorists" by the Russian government) partook in a widely watched soccer match as part of the victory celebrations, with the winning team being awarded a flame thrower.(63) .

Considering the many horrors this people suffered during the Russian invasion, it is not surprising that the Chechen leadership has chosen such confrontational commemorations. Perhaps one of the greatest insults to the Chechens during the war was the systematic destruction of much of their cultural and national heritage during the Russian siege of Grozny. In February 1995, the Russian army destroyed the Central State Archive of the Chechen Republic in Grozny, home to over two hundred years of documents, folk costumes, archaeological material, archival collections, manuscripts and other material on the Chechens and Ingush people. This cultural site had no military value to the Russian army, and President Dudaev had actively lobbied with historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnologists and others in Russia to preserve it. Perhaps one of the most irreplaceable losses in the destruction of the Central Archives was that of approximately 90,000 newly declassified documents dealing with the Chechen deportation to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.(64) The destruction of this, the largest single archival fund related to the national tragedy of the Chechen people, may have been a calculated move by the Russian leadership to destroy this reservoir of grievances against Russia.

If this was the intention, the Yeltsin administration only succeeded in creating new causes for grievance. The Chechen people considered this action to be "culturecide" aimed at destroying the historical evidence of their people's long inhabitation of their homeland in preparation for a new deportation. In addition to the Central Archives, the Scientific Research Institute of the Humanities of the Chechen Republic, established in 1907--whose library contained a rich collection of all the important works of the Caucasian world, including original works by medieval writers, along with field material on research into the language of the Chechen and Ingush people and their ethnography--was totally destroyed by Russian forces in

1995 during the First Russo-Chechen War.(65) .

This calculated destruction of a people's heritage can be compared to the destruction of the Bosnian National Archival Museum in Sarajevo by Republika Srbska forces during the Bosnian conflict. During the siege of Sarajevo, Serbian gunners deliberately destroyed this building which housed the premiere collection of historic documents and books dealing with Ottoman culture in the Balkans. The intention on this occasion was obvious: to obliterate the memory and physical evidence of hundreds of year of despised Muslim rule in the region. As in Bosnia, where Croats destroyed the famed ancient Ottoman bridge of Mostar (built during the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the mid-1500s) and Serbs destroyed scores of mosques, caravansaries, bazaars, Muslim cemeteries and other monuments of Muslim culture, Russian forces in Chechnya often began their attacks on Chechen villages by using the minaret on village mosques as a target. Many mosques, often simple concrete edifices with basic decorative minarets built since the post-Soviet revival of Islam in the region, were destroyed during the Russian invasion. As in past Russian invasions, the Chechens' hallowed cemeteries were vandalized as well. .

The destruction of the historic facets of Chechen culture was often accompanied by the destruction of the people themselves. If the slaughter of Chechen villager,; in the mountain village of Khaibakh during the deportation became a symbolic monument of the deportation, then the destruction of the lowland village of Samashki by Russian Federation forces in April 1995 has come to symbolize the tragedy of the Russian invasion for the Chechen people. Russian forces killed over a hundred civilians in this village when the villagers did not give up the required number of weapons to Russian special forces attempting to flush out pro-Dudaev fighters from the village.(66) The village was destroyed in the process and, when word of the massacre at Samashki spread throughout Chechnya, thousands of neutral Chechens joined the conflict on the side of Dudaev's anti-Russian forces.

While there are many factors that must be taken into consideration when gauging the Chechen peoples' relations with Russia (the Chechen leadership's maneuvering for control over pipelines transporting oil from the Caspian to the Black Sea, the increasing role of Wahhabi Islam in the northern Caucasus, clan-mafia interests in Chechnya, links to Chechens in Dagestan etc.), outsiders should not underestimate the importance of the Chechens' collective memory of the deportation, which has been reinforced

by the experience of the recent conflicts. It has been said that one must know a nation's tragedies and the way its people commemorate them to know its soul. If this is so then today's Chechens are indeed trapped in the wheels of history and define themselves in opposition to their historic "other," the Russians.

POSTSCRIPT

While the issue of Chechnya's ultimate status in regards to Russia was shelved from 1996 to 1999, Russia appears to be once more maneuvering to reassert its claim to this land. In the fall of 1999 Russian Federation troops again entered Chechnya and began "pinpoint precision" bombings of "terrorist bases" which have caused heavy civilian casualties throughout the country. This has once again led to the radicalization of a considerable segment of the Chechen population as thousands are made homeless by Russian bombardments. Tens of thousands of Chechens have been forced to flee from their republic to avoid the indiscriminate shelling of their villages by Russian artillery since September 1999. A reporter on the refugee-packed Chechen-Ingush border interviewed a war-numbed Chechen living with hundreds of his countrymen in parked railway carriages who summed up his people's pain and humiliation by noting that "[m]any of my family died in the railway transports in 1944. My parents survived but my father was killed in 1995 in the last war. And now we're back in the railway."(67)

At the time of the writing of this article (February 2000), the Chechen leadership had just completed the evacuation of Grozny-Djohar after a fierce five-month Russian bombardment. Prior to this evacuation military analysts had been perplexed at the Chechen leadership's desire to defend the strategically unimportant ruins of the once flourishing city of 400,000 (now reduced to 20,000) against the full onslaught of the Russian army. In the face of constant aerial bombardment which saw the Russians use their terrifyingly efficient vacuum bombs (an advanced fuel air version of napalm bombs) and long-distance heavy bombardment designed to fulfill Russian general Viacheslav Tikhomerov's stated objective of "wiping Grozny from the face of the earth," approximately 4,000 Chechen defenders were able to hold off an army of as many as 100,000 for five months in one of the most unusual defenses in history.(68) It was only with great reluctance that the Chechens gave up their increasingly untenable position due, in part, to a lack of supplies and ammunition needed to prolong the defense of the shattered

city.

In the days following the evacuation the reasons for the astonishingly stubborn (and ultimately costly from the Chechen perspective) defense of Grozny-Djohar became apparent. It appears that the Chechen leadership had been determined to hold the Chechen capital until the commemorative date of 23 February 2000 as a symbolic gesture designed to galvanize the suffering Chechen population and remind the world of their largely overlooked deportation on that date fifty-six years earlier.(69) After their costly retreat from Grozny-Djohar into the foothills and mountains of southern Chechnya, the approximately 8,000-10,000-strong Chechen guerrilla army continues to receive support from the majority of southern Chechnya's long-suffering civilian population which still fears another deportation should the Russian Federation emerge victorious in the conflict.

Recently uncovered documents from the Russian government do nothing to assuage the fears of these highlander southern Chechens. In a recent article entitled "Another Forced Deportation?" Paul Goble describes a December 1999 report accepted by the Russian government which is chilling in its similarity to reports sent between Beriia and Stalin that led to the destruction in 1944 of such mountain villages as Khaibakh and the deportation of the Chechen people. Goble writes: "The language of the report is stark.... It says that participants in the mid-December meeting agreed that Chechen settlements in the mountains do not have `economic or other value' and thus `must be completely liquidated'." The second half of the report is more frightening for Chechens who live in constant dread of another deportation and calls for "the creation of conditions unsuitable for human habitation in the future" and "the resettlement of peaceful residents from that part of Chechnya either north of the Terek River [the northern flat country traditionally dominated by Russians] or their assimilation in other areas of Russia."(70)

This process of displacement has already begun as tens of thousands of Chechen males have been randomly arrested and sent to notorious "filtration centers" in Mozdok (Ossetia) and Chernokosovo. Many of these "bandit detainees" have been killed during interrogation or sent on to Omsk in Siberia for "reeducation." According to those who have survived these camps, the Russians intend to send as many 150,000 Chechens through this system designed to break their spirit.(71) .

To the collective memory of the slaughter of scores of Chechens in the highlander village of Khaibakh in 1944 and the mass execution of villagers in Samashki in the 1994-1996 invasion can now be added the widely reported killing of over forty villagers in the Chechen village of Alkhan Yurt in December 1999 by Russian Federation forces.(72) The Chechens' rancor has thus only been fed by the Russian Federation's recent rough-handed "antiterrorist operations for the liquidation of bandit formations" which have been marked by the Russian military's inability (or unwillingness) to differentiate between a terrorist camp and a normal Chechen village.

In light of these events it is not surprising that, after the Chechen retreat into the southern mountains, Russia's generals in Grozny were prepared for a determined Chechen counterattack on Grozny-Djohar designed to coincide with the anniversary of the deportation.(73) Precautions were also made throughout the Russian Federation against a surprise repeat of Basaev's raid into Russia during the previous war which might be timed to coincide with this symbolic date. At the time of the writing of this article, the Russian hopes for a quick "pacification" of the Chechen guerrillas and the absorption of Chechnya into Russia seem remote indeed. A Russian source recently reported that "[t]he full integration of the Republic of Chechnya into the Russian Federation is impossible--it is hindered by historical memory, the experience of the past decade's two wars and the peculiarities of Chechen mentality, customs etc."(74) The Chechens' historical experience would seem to bear out this gloomy prognosis, as one Chechen spokesman recently concluded: "At the end, the Chechen nation will defeat Russia, because we fought them for 400 years. And my children's attitude towards Russia and Russians is more negative than my own."(75) Thus, as Russia once more engages in brinkmanship with the secessionist Chechens and resumes the bombing of civilian centers so emblematic of the 1994-1996 Chechen War, those in charge of this military operation would benefit from an understanding of the salient nature of the Chechens' collective memory of past victimization at the hands of Russia and the ways in which this memory will certainly shape their views of their northern neighbor for decades to come.

NOTES

(1.) Christopher Panico, Conflicts in the Caucasus: Russia's War in Chechnya, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism (Washington, DC, July 1995), 3. .

(2.) Author's interview with Chechen descendants of exiles in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Jan. 1996. .

(3.) For a comparative analysis of trauma commemoration among the deported Crimean Tatars, see Brian Glyn Williams, "The Crimean Tatar Exile in Central Asia: A Case Study in Group Destruction and Survival," Central Asian Survey 17, no. 2 (June 1998): 285-319. .

(4.) "Ob utverzhdenii ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR" (On the confirmation of decrees of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet), Izvestiia, 26 June 1946, 2. .

(5.) Iu. A. Aidaev, Chechentsy: Istoriia i sovremennost' (The Chechens: History and Modern Times) (Moscow, 1996). .

(6.) Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1952 (Thus it was: National repressions in the USSR, 1919-1952) (Moscow, 1993).

(7.) Aidaev, Chechentsy, 262. .

(8.) N. F. Bugai, L. Beriia--I. Stalinu: "Soglasno vashemu ukazaniiu'" (L. Beriia--I. Stalin: "In accordance with your command") (Moscow, 1995), 103.

(9.) N. F. Bugai, "Beriia dokladyvaet Stalinu" (Beriia reports to Stalin), Kommunist, no. 3 (Feb. 1991): 103.

(10.) D. Khodzhaev, "Genotsid" (Genocide), in Tak eto bylo, 2:169; cf. Iu. Mazur, Chechnia: Tak eto bylo (Chechnya: Thus it was), vol. 2 (Odessa, 1996), 11.

(11.) Khodzhaev, "Genotsid," 178-79.

(12.) Cited in Anatol Lieven, Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power (New Haven, 1998), 322.

(13.) John B. Dunlop, Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict (Cambridge, 1998), 65.

(14.) Cited in Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, "The Chechens and Ingush during the Soviet Period and Its Antecedents," in Marie Bennigsen Broxup et al., The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World (London, 1992), 185.

(15.) Nikolai F. Bugai, "Pravda o deportatsii chechenskogo i ingushkogo narodov" (The truth about the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush peoples), Voprosy istorii, no. 7 (1990): 140.

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