

History Matters Conference
Rough Paper Copy—Rachel Schroeder
Memory as Mission: The Life Cycle of the Memorial Society
(Memory-Work and the Gulag: The Politics of Memory in the Russian Experience)
Introduction:

One formative event of the 20th century that led to the deaths of millions of victims is the Soviet Gulag. In the period of glasnost in the Soviet Union and in the early transition period “truth-telling” about the Gulag and the repressions of the past garnered a great deal of attention in the Soviet and then the Russian public spheres. One particular group of Russians in the late 1980s created the group Memorial, which became what may be considered a vanguard group in the movement towards remembering the atrocities of the Soviet past. As Geoffrey Hosking writes, in this time period of glasnost and transition, “the significance of Memorial as a formative influence on public attitudes and as a nursery for future political movements can scarcely be overstated” (1992, 17).

However, throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century Memorial and the issues of the Gulag and repression have lost the heightened resonance that surrounded them in the earlier years, and truth-telling about the Soviet past seems to garner less interest from the Russian public. Memorial and the issues it represents have seemed to decline in importance in the collective consciousness of the Russian people.

This apparent rise and subsequent decline of Memorial presents an important case for the interrogation of the intersections of history, memory, and violence in the post-Soviet context. The current Russian regime still continues to gain much of its legitimacy from the Soviet system, and there has been no clear break with the Soviet past in general. Thus, this paper will briefly outline the history of the politics of memory surrounding the Gulag in the Soviet period in its relation to the rise and decline of Memorial. In order to

better theorize the possible causes of Memorial's perceived decline, social movement theory will be introduced in relation to Memorial. One specific spatial dynamic of Memorial's fight for public space for Gulag-memory will also be introduced in the paper. Finally, some more general possible explanations for the decline of Memorial will be offered.

Politics of Memory and Memorial's Rise:

The politics of memory surrounding the Gulag and other forms of repression in the Soviet period is a very complicated process to capture, and thus here because of time constraints it will be presented in a very simplified form. Partially through a process of ideological indoctrination and partially through the use and threat of myriad forms of violence and repression the totalitarian Soviet regime attempted to control its citizens. Through this process of ideological indoctrination and the threat of terror certain forms of memory, especially those surrounding the Gulag, became dangerous. Thus, Gulag survivors were often sentenced to subsequent terms or exile and were stigmatized upon return from the camps, and the family and friends of supposed "enemies of the people" risked a Gulag sentence. Writing in the glasnost period, three Russian historians, Daria Khbova, Andrei Ivankiev, and Tonia Sharova state: "Yet the Soviet Union is perhaps the most remarkable case of all: a society, probably unique in the whole world, where remembering has been dangerous at least since the 1920s" (1992, 89).

However, despite the weight of forced silence and forgetting imposed from above, the obliteration and destruction of personal or individual memory and some forms of collective memory was impossible. As Rubie Watson writes, it is "important not to lose

sight of the fact that state socialist regimes had the capacity to be both brutally coercive and vulnerable at the same time” (1994, 2). Zeks—camp prisoners—did survive and return from the “other world” of the camps and exile carrying their memories of violence and mass death. When “enemies of the people” disappeared they left families and friends behind to remember them. Also, not all of the victims of the Soviet regime died “silently.” Some victims, especially perhaps those of the Ukrainian famine, died quite “loudly,” in that their starved and emaciated bodies were often visible to the wider population in public spaces (Merridale). Major population centers had their own camps as well making it difficult for citizens not to run into prisoners (Applebaum, 2000). It was therefore impossible for the Soviet regime to completely obliterate memory and thus a counter-current of a “politics of Gulag-memory” existed under the weight of silence and forgetting.

The “Thaw” period under Khrushchev provided the first major opportunity for the release of Gulag-memory, albeit in a limited sense. With Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the XXth Party Conference and his less secret release of information at the XXIInd Party Conference, information dealing with the repression of party members was released. Stalin and his “cult of personality” were held responsible for the “excesses” of the Stalinist era, but there was no official release of information regarding the repressions of the “masses.” Yet this partial release of information by the authorities created a structural opportunity for other forms of “remembering” to arise. Despite Khrushchev’s attempts to release information without directly questioning the legitimacy of the Party and Soviet system, the counter-current of a politics of memory was ultimately provided with a certain amount of legitimacy and authority.

Following the Khrushchev period, there was the “re-freeze” period of Brezhnev where reactionary policies against the perceived liberal period of the “thaw” were reinstated. Brezhnev used repression and violence to attempt to quell or reverse the growth of the counter-current of Gulag-memory. The reversal of the first sanctioned release of Gulag-memory proved difficult, and ultimately it became impossible to quell it even in the midst of the re-constituted repressions. Memory again proved to be beyond the purview of governmental policies and thus the act of “forced forgetting” was impossible.

With the ascension of Gorbachev as the head of the Soviet Union, the framework of glasnost and perestroika led to the first major releases of Gulag-memory in Soviet society. Specifically, the glasnost period’s emphasis on “openness” and partial liberalization created a structural and political opportunity whereby the “neformaly” or informal groups were able to develop from 1986 to 1988 (Smith, 1996; Sedaitis and Butterfield, 1991). The informals were independent groups of Soviet citizens who came together independently of the government to meet and discuss various topics, such as sports or literature. Despite government opposition to the growth of the informals over time the popularity of informals grew as the younger intellectuals and dissidents joined various groups. The informals quickly became a catalyst for more organized forms of popular collective action—namely, social movements concerned with the creation of civil society and democracy in the Soviet Union.

In 1987, one small group of dissidents and intellectuals who were active in the informal network decided to unite in the attempt to begin a petition aimed towards the creation of a monument to the victims of Soviet repression. As the popularity of the petition grew, and as the group leading the petition drive began to face government

opposition, this small group grew to become not only the major institution of Gulag-memory in Soviet Russia, but also one of the major democratic social movements in the USSR—Memorial. Hosking writes that, by June 1988 Memorial had collected 30,000 signatures for their petition, and that “by January 1989, when its founding congress was held, [Memorial] had 180 or so branches (103 of which were represented at it), with perhaps 20,000 active members” (1992, 17). Memorial had thus, in the late 1980s, developed into a full-fledged social movement led by many of the most prominent Soviet intellectuals and dissidents, including Andrei Sakharov, Yevgeniy Yevtushenko, Boris El'tsin, Roy Medvedyev, and Yuri Afanasyev.

The metamorphosis of the informals into social movements, or organized forms of collective behavior aimed towards specific goals, has been documented by social movement scholars such as Judith Sedaitis, Jim Butterfield, Geoffrey Hosking, Peter Duncan, and Jonathan Aves, as a significant event in the movement of the Soviet Union towards a democratic transition. Sedaitis and Butterfield term their research on the independent social movements, “perestroika from below,” while other scholars have even termed this period, “democracy from below” (1991). For social movement scholars, Gorbachev’s attempted adherence to the principles of glasnost created a political and structural opportunity for “bottom-up” political organizations and social movements to arise, including Memorial.

With the founding congress, Memorial branched out its goals to include their more general mission statement to “remember the victims of repression” by creating research centers and archives and by carrying out interviews and oral histories with Gulag survivors, and myriad Memorial branches were instituted across the Soviet Union.

However, as a social movement, the more “radical” or politically oriented members tended to also be the most influential members, so over time Memorial also became a powerful democratic and anti-establishment social movement despite the reservations of many of the members and despite the fact that Memorial never openly declared itself as an oppositional party or even as a politically orientated group. For some of the Memorial members there was a strong link between the importance of remembering the victims of Soviet repression and the push towards democracy in the current Soviet Union and thus Memorial became an influential movement for democracy. Yet even with its growing popularity as a movement for democracy and its unprecedented collection of signatures for the petition, Memorial could not escape the attempts at pre-emption made by Gorbachev and the Soviet government, and even fears of governmental co-optation ran high.

In June 1988, at the Party Conference, Gorbachev announced that he did support the idea of a monument to the victims of the Stalinist repressions, but Memorial was not mentioned at all in conjunction with the monument (Smith, 1996, 91). Soon after Gorbachev’s remarks the Memorial members came face-to-face with their fears of governmental pre-emption. The All-Union Ministry of Culture announced at the end of 1988 after seeing “the degree of commitment and the popularity of Memorial” that it would build a monument to the “ ‘victims of lawlessness and repression that took place during the years of the personality cult’ ” (Butterfield and Weigle, 1991, 180). As Butterfield and Weigle write, “the purpose of the Ministry was clear: to pre-empt Memorial by embracing its goals, albeit in a watered-down fashion, while refusing to recognize the group as the author of those goals” (180). Soon the Memorial funds that

were to be put towards the creation and construction of the memorial to the victims of repression were frozen by the government (180). Thus arose the major battle for the claim to public space for the remembrance of the Gulag. Without the right to build a monument to the victims of the Soviet repressions, Memorial could not make its claim to the legitimacy of Gulag-memory by grounding Gulag-memory in public space. As has been shown through the work of Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz with the Vietnam Veteran's Monument and also with the work of James Young, memorials and monuments, in their act of grounding memory in public space, allow a society to take part in an act of "memory-work" whereby disparate and conflicting memories can be presented and even discussed—thus leading to a societal "working-through" of memories of a violent past. If the Soviet government were to build the monument, it was widely feared that the events of the terror and repression would ultimately be imbued with heroism instead of emphasizing the nature of the victims as victims, which was Memorial's emphasis for the monument (Smith, 1996). Thus, if "heroism" were emphasized in the memorial there would ultimately be no need for public discussion and dialogue concerning the atrocities of the Soviet era, and there would be no need to question the legitimacy of the Soviet regime.

In 1990, facing the continuing rise in the popularity of Memorial, and considering the intervention of Gorbachev in the debate after pressure from Sakharov, the Soviet government finally gave up its attempt to pre-empt Memorial's goals and yielded to Memorial's proposal to build a monument to the victims of the Soviet repression (Butterfield and Weigle, 1991, 181). Thus, a stone from the first camp at the Solovki monastery was placed on a platform in the small square in front of the Lubyanka, which

had served as a prison and execution area during the Soviet period and that continued to house the KGB. At the time it was erected, and in the years directly following its erection, the Solovki stone provided a powerful place for survivors, the families of survivors, dissidents and intellectuals, and Russian citizens to meet and remember the atrocities of the Soviet regime. To many, the Solovki stone became a symbolic “tombstone” for the millions who had died and who had been buried in anonymous mass graves across the expanse of the Soviet Union. However, in comparison to the many monuments and memorials that existed throughout the Soviet Union honoring other historical events, the stone’s claim to public space is ultimately perhaps not that powerful—the stone could easily be overlooked during a stroll through Lubyanka square. Therefore, although Memorial was able to “win” a major battle for the right to commemorate the victims of the Gulag, in its small stature, the memorial’s claim to public space might prove to be quite fragile.

During the late glasnost period and especially with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the thirst for knowledge of the “truth” of the Soviet period within Russia was at a high level. As is apparent from the media publications of the time period, there was great enthusiasm put forth by Russian citizens for the ideals of democracy, liberalism, and pluralism, and remembrance and commemoration of past events rose in importance in the collective consciousness of the Russian citizens. Much public discussion surrounded these topics as well as the events of the past. Memorial found itself on the front lines of this growing interest in the events of the past as well as in the discussion surrounding the direction of the future of Russian society. With the fall of the USSR, many of the more politically active Memorial members were swept up in the transition to democracy while

those that stayed were active in promoting the “truth” about the atrocities of the Soviet past. The period of the late 1980s to the early 1990s thus marked the high point for the life cycle of Memorial as a social movement. In this time period, Memorial had a great deal more power than any other independent social group in the history of the Soviet Union.

However, following the initial collapse of the Soviet Union, Memorial declined in popularity, as did many of the glasnost period social movements. Kathleen Smith argues that this is in part because the more influential and politically inclined members left for positions within the new government and thus the membership base lost a great deal of its power (1996). Memorial also faced institutionalization because much of its power was connected to its role as a democratic social movement and thus as the major fight for democratization was beginning to be realized the group became de-politicized and thus it could no longer declare itself as anti-establishment or against the status quo. In the early transition period, it perhaps seemed as if the goals of Memorial would quickly be accomplished and thus it became more difficult to mobilize Russian citizens towards helping to fulfill the goals especially since these goals began to lose their emotional immediacy and urgency and also since the more prominent Memorial members, the dissidents and intellectuals, had moved to the political sector of the emerging government. Finally, it is more difficult for a movement to stay mobilized and active when it does not have a clear opponent in which to fight against, and in the early transition period there was no clear opponent in existence since so much emphasis was being placed on the very goals that Memorial was working toward. Memorial thus claimed its position within the new Russian society as a special interest group relating to Gulag survivor-rights and other

issues concerning Gulag-memory. But despite its apparent institutionalization in Russian society, Memorial continued to be a prominent and influential group in the emerging Russian civil society in the early transition period especially considering its role as the major institution of Gulag-memory in the new Russian society. The Memorial centers in Moscow and Petersburg as well as the regional societies were able to further their archival holdings, were able to establish Gulag research centers, were able to initiate educational programs, and also in 1994 the former concentration camp Perm-36 was made into the first Gulag museum.

Memorial's Decline:

But it has become apparent from the late 1990s through the present that Memorial and the Gulag no longer hold the same level of resonance for Russian citizens as they did in the early transition period. Many of the successes of the initial transition period were soon overshadowed by extreme economic and social problems in the “new” Russia. Gulag-memory and Memorial perhaps lost their prominence as they became background issues to rising inequality, crime, and an “ailing sense of national pride” (Adler, 2001, 301). Emphasis within Russian society thus moved from issues of the Soviet past to the worsening societal conditions in the present.

The stone from the Solovetsky labor camps could perhaps be seen as a spatial representation of this decline of Memorial. When the stone was first placed in Lubyanka square it embodied a great deal of meaning and power in that it represented a major accomplishment in the battle to bring Gulag-memory to the public sphere by claiming public space for a memorial to the victims of the repressions. However, the image

produced by a visit to the stone today produces much different emotions and images than it did at the time it was erected as a monument to the victims of the Gulag.

Firstly, it is easy to miss the memorial if you are not familiar with its location. You must find the small park situated between two metro entrances near the Mayakovsky museum. You must then look carefully for the stone since its stature is not great. The easiest way to find the stone is to look for the overly large and yellowish building which is the (*un-marked*) Lubyanka, the former prison and execution site and present home of the FSB and the KGB spy museum. Upon approaching the stone you may even find that it is littered with beer bottles and cigarette wrappers, and there may even be a few Russians congregating around it to use it as a footrest or as a seat as they chat on their cellular phones. You may also receive strange glances from citizens enjoying the afternoon while sitting on the park benches if you take a serious interest in the stone. If you wish to light a candle it may be difficult to find a candle stand that is still standing, and if you are lucky than the sign explaining what the stone is will not be lying dented on the ground. It quickly becomes apparent that the meaning surrounding the Solovki stone has changed greatly in recent years. As James Young writes, “By themselves, monuments are of little value, mere *stones* in the landscape” (1994, 2; emphasis added). Has the Solovki stone become just that, a stone in the landscape? Can the stone even be considered a “monument” as such? In looking back at the creation of the memorial to the victims of the Gulag compared to its inability to truly claim public space for Gulag-memory now, it becomes apparent that the Gulag and the concerns of Memorial may not be considered as important as they once were. Young writes, “By returning to the memorial some memory of its own genesis, we remind ourselves of the memorial’s

essential fragility, its dependence on others for its life...” (1994, 14). In its inability to garner the same level of public attention as it once did has the Solovki stone become a “dislocated sign”? Can the stone continue to refer to the issues of “Gulag-memory” that it was originally meant to bring to public space in contemporary Russia?

Social Movement Theory and Memorial’s Decline:

One possible window through which to attempt to explain Memorial’s decline is that of social movement theory. Political opportunity theory, resource mobilization theory, frame analysis, and the more recent theories on the meaning-making processes of social movements can perhaps provide important information about the “life cycle” of Memorial. However, there seem to be important limits to the explanatory power of the social movement theories I choose to focus on.

Political Opportunity:

It seems that in the early period of the rise of Memorial that the existence of a structural and political opportunity was perhaps the most important reason that Memorial and other social movements were able to emerge in Soviet society. Through the attempted institution of liberal policies by Gorbachev, a structural “hole” was created where for the first time independent groups of like-minded Soviet citizens could form groups aimed towards collective action in Soviet society.

However, it seems that after the initial transition period that this political opportunity structure disappeared. With the rise of serious economic and social crises, emphasis moved from exposing the crimes of the Soviet past to the creation of stability in the new Russian society. With this increasing emphasis on stability the Russian

government began to renew attempts to co-opt and pre-empt movements like Memorial through the institution of new funding laws for independent groups, and the government also continued its earlier attempts to infiltrate Memorial with members of the security forces and to create dissent within the ranks of Memorial's members. To a certain degree Memorial was able to resist these governmental attempts at pre-emption and co-optation. However, Memorial's ability to creatively act within the structures of the newly formed Russian government was greatly hampered. This was compounded by the decreasing lack of interest garnered by Memorial from the general public as many of the citizens of Russia struggled to survive in the worsening economic and social conditions.

Resource Mobilization:

Charles Tilly argues that in the glasnost period that the mobilization of economic resources was not an important aspect of the rise of independent social movements, but instead that the political opportunity structure that existed was the greatest factor. However, beyond the initial transition period it seems that resource mobilization theory has much more to offer in explanatory power than it did in the earlier period in that it partly explains the resulting institutionalization of Memorial.

Following the initial transition period, the rise of a capitalist economy in Russia made the ability to garner economic resources more important for the glasnost period social movements. Thus, the institution of new funding laws by the Russian government made it more difficult for the movements like Memorial to garner the economic resources they needed to organize. Overall Memorial was able to keep a fairly steady level of monetary resources that allowed them to create research centers, but in order to be able to

receive funding it was necessary for Memorial to become registered by the government and to ultimately become institutionalized at a certain level in Russian society.

Also, the ability of Memorial to mobilize adherents and constituents became hampered during the transition period. Many of Memorial's members faced financial hardship with the rise of the economic crises which made them unable to be as active in the group. Emphasis thus moved from remembering the past to working to survive in the present. Ultimately, the rise of economic and social problems greatly reduced Memorial's ability to recruit and keep active members.

Frame Analysis:

In the glasnost period Memorial gained much of its popularity from its informal designation as a democratic social movement with an emphasis on remembering the atrocities of the Soviet past. Memorial became a significant force in the move towards democratization in part because of its creation of a link between remembering the Gulag and the push towards democracy. Memorial was able to take the emphasis of the Soviet and early Russian governments' on remembering the Gulag and to take it further to the memorialization of the victims of the Gulag. In this sense, Memorial pushed beyond the limited range of the government in the partial release of information to the full-fledged attempt to create public discourse about the contradictory and conflicting images of the Soviet past through the creation of a monument to the victims. In going beyond the realm of limited Gulag-memory being presented by the government Memorial was able to directly link its "frames" of Gulag-memory and democratization to the rising "master frame" of the creation of "civil society" within the new Russian society. This link

between Memorial and the rising emphasis on the creation of civil society is perhaps what gave Memorial its power and resonance in the initial transition period.

However, in looking at the Memorial Society's main publication, the *Informational Bulletin*, the master frame as well as the more general frames of the Memorial Society have changed substantially since the early transition period's emphasis on Gulag-memory, democracy, and civil society. As is apparent from the Memorial publications from 1999 to present, Memorial began to situate itself within the developing "human rights" master frame that has gathered much credence in the West. Much of the emphasis for the Memorial bulletins from 1999 on deals with "prava cheloveka" ("human rights"), whether this be references to human rights abuses in the past dealing with the Gulag, or references to current human rights abuses in the Caucasus region. In re-situating itself within the human rights master frame, Memorial has also re-situated its group frame to deal more with present-day instances of violence in places such as Dagestan and Chechnya than with the atrocities of the Gulag-era. This does not mean that Memorial has changed its overall mission to "remember the victims of Soviet repressions," but it does show that perhaps in order to stay "relevant" for the present-day Russian society Memorial needed to juxtapose its democratic and Gulag-memory frames of the past with the more current human rights frame by creating a mental continuity between the atrocities of the Gulag-era with the state-sponsored atrocities in past and current wars in Chechnya. In each of the issues of the *Informational Bulletin* from 1999 on articles dealing with educational activities related to the Gulag or efforts at bringing attention to the Gulag-era are juxtaposed with articles detailing efforts to lobby the government to end the war in Chechnya or articles detailing recent atrocities in the Caucasus region.

Overall, the articles on the Caucasus region outnumber the articles related to the Gulag-era in almost all of the *Bulletins* since 1999.

The meaning-making process involved in the changing of frames is important in the attempt to diagnose and explain the resulting decline in resonance of Memorial and the Gulag in the consciousness of Russian citizens. Ultimately, it is a small number of individuals and groups in Russian society who choose to protest the actions taken by the Russian government in Chechnya, especially since they are at risk for being viewed as trouble-makers and modern-day dissidents by the government. Thus, although Memorial may have created greater interest in its organization in the West, including the U.S., by adopting the human rights framework, it may have remained difficult for Memorial to mobilize Russian citizens around its mission for Gulag-memory or even for its mission to end the war in Chechnya since neither topic, despite their intense emotional significance, are our major issues of discussion within the wider Russian society.

Possible Limits to Social Movement Theory:

Although social movement theory has the potential to provide theoretical explanations for the decline of Memorial, it does seem to perhaps have one possible weakness—its inability to incorporate issues of memory. Is there a social movement theoretical framework that incorporates issues of memory in a sufficient manner? The more recent attempts to theorize the meaning-making processes of social movements seem to hold the potential to incorporate issues of memory, but it seems that perhaps they have not yet taken up this direction of thought. However, the ability to better theorize social movements like Memorial that gain much of their power through their links to issues of memory, such as those in Russia and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa,

seems an important area of sociological inquiry. What possible ways are there of linking issues of memory to sociological theories of social movements?

Memorial's Decline—More General Explanations:

Again, many of the successes of the initial transition period were soon overshadowed by extreme economic and social problems in the “new” Russia. Emphasis within Russian society thus moved from issues of the atrocities of the past to the emphasis on stability and survival in the present. Nostalgia for the perceived stability of the Soviet era took precedence over the discussion and dialogue surrounding the Soviet past. Writing in the early 1990s, Kathleen Smith posits that, “as long as Russia’s democratic and market institutions remain weak, its politicians may join their Latin American colleagues in giving present stability priority over an exploration of past injustices” (1996, 208). It seems that this is perhaps what happened, the politicians continue to emphasize stability while neglecting the exploration of the Soviet past.

Also, the rise in social and economic problems was compounded by the rise in corruption following the privatization process. Russian society became polarized between the “average” Russian citizens facing a devastating decline in socio-economic status and life chances and the entrenched nomenklatura and mafia members who were reaping the benefits of privatization as “novye russkye.” This coupling of the democratic transition with the capitalist transition perhaps led to a loss in “faith” in the ideals of democracy for Russian citizens considering that those individuals who seemed to be benefiting from the pluralism of democracy were the “novye russkye” and not the “average” Russians. Thus, it seems that the ideals of democracy that Memorial had taken

up in its mission began to be devalued in the wider Russian society through their partial and inconsistent implementation.

This is perhaps compounded by the focus of the government on the future of Russia at the neglect of its past. Even under president Vladimir Putin there has been no clear break with the Soviet past for the “new” Russian government. Many of the Party apparatchiks still hold positions in government and business, and despite the name change there has been no clear de-Stalinization of the present-day security forces (secret police), the FSB, from their recent past as the notorious KGB. Putin and his government attempt to put emphasis on the future while continuing to gain legitimacy from the Soviet past. Putin’s government is even active in reconstituting the Soviet past through nostalgic forms, such as bringing back the music to the Soviet anthem and the red stars on military vehicles, while at the same moment disregarding the more problematic aspects of the Soviet era. Putin’s government, as Memorial has shown through its publications and public demonstrations, has also had a questionable civil and human rights record at home as well as in Chechnya, and also a problematic relationship with the concept of free speech and the media. The Soviet era prison and camps system was also never completely dismantled, and thus remains operational to a certain extent, and instituting the rule of law has been difficult (Stern, 1998). The recent presidential and parliamentary election results are also disturbing in that they not only show voter apathy, but they may also possibly indicate the end of the period of democratization in Russia.

Beyond the lack of a clear break with the Soviet past within the government, there is also a cultural legacy of Stalinism present in Russian society. Silence is still a characteristic often mentioned about the population of Russia. In a sense, there is still a

“culture of denial” surrounding the atrocities of the Soviet period that has perhaps extended into a culture of denial surrounding the events of the current war in Chechnya and other civil and human rights violations (Merridale, 2000, 302). This “culture of denial” may be part of the explanation for the recent voter behavior in Russia that was characterized most clearly by a sense of apathy and disconnect from political issues. As one student at Moscow University stated on an interview on NPR, “We may have a dictatorship in the future, but as long as it is an enlightened dictatorship it should not be that bad,” and as another student stated about the elections, “Our choice has been made for us...” (reference unavailable at this moment). Also, victims of the Gulag have been unable to unite in a coherent form even decades after the events themselves, perhaps because, as Nanci Adler writes: “How can you be a victim of a regime never declared to be criminal?” (Adler, 2001, 289). Even Memorial has remarked on a gradual rehabilitation of Stalinism (Adler, 2000, 292). Ultimately, it seems apparent that as Catherine Merridale argues, the “cultural legacy of Stalinism persists alongside modern cash machines and internet cafes” (2000, 321).

Perhaps one of the most important and most problematic reasons for the decline in interest in Memorial and the Gulag is the complicity of Russian citizens in the atrocities of the Soviet era. In Soviet society the line between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders was completely blurred, and thus assigning guilt is a difficult if not impossible process (Sherbakova, 1992, 108). Informing on neighbors, family members, and friends along with other forms of complicity often became a survival mechanisms in Soviet society. Thus, the push by Memorial for Russians to remember, memorialize, and discuss the atrocities of the Gulag-era may have created a painful and difficult situation for the “new

Russia. How is a society to deal with its complicity in the violent actions of its government?

Conclusion:

In transitional societies, “bottom-up” or citizen-led memory organizations and institutions have played an important role in the transition to democracy, especially in the creation of a public sphere for the discussion of violent events sponsored by the government in the past. Since its creation in the glasnost period, Memorial has played an important role in Russian society in the push for the development of democracy, civil society, and human rights based upon the rule of law while continuing to emphasize the remembrance of the victims of Soviet repression. However, following the initial transition period Memorial lost a great deal of its power as a social movement and as a Gulag-memory organization.

In writing about the independent social movements of the glasnost period, Andrew Arato raised a very important question. He asks whether the independent social movements in the Soviet Union would have an influence in the development of civil society in the newly democratizing Russia? Would democracy be able to take hold from below? It seems from my analysis of the “life cycle” of Memorial that the answer to Arato’s question is most likely that the independent social movements did not have as great of an influence on the development of civil society and democracy as seemed possible in the initial transition period. Ultimately, democracy did not take hold from below.

It seems that the reinstatement of political and structural constraints coupled with the rise of social problems has made it difficult for social movements, including Memorial to keep members mobilized. Also, despite the attempts of Memorial to find an appropriate “master frame” in order to garner support for its goals, it seems that the way in which Memorial frames its mission impedes its ability to mobilize the populous towards its mission. This is perhaps especially so considering the focus on the present need for “stability” in Russia as opposed to the need to remember and discuss the past.

Finally, the study of Memorial is important in the attempt to interrogate the implications of a “silent” or “forgotten” past for the development of civil society and democracy in the current Russian society. As the experience of Memorial shows, when the political climate is right there is the potential for a citizen-led institution of social memory to not only begin to develop a current of counter-memory to that of the government, but to imbue the citizens of the nation with a certain power through “memory-as-resistance.” But what happens when the power of oppositional memory fades? Afanasev wrote that, “one of Memorial’s tasks [was] to transform itself into a model for new social movements that will become polar opposites of Stalinism. The more movements that appear[ed], the more strongly Soviet [and now Russian] society will be structured, and the greater will be the guarantee against a return to the old times” (qtd. in Smith, 1996, 103). Is it possible that the decline of Memorial represents a possible “return” to a new form of the “old times” that Memorial’s founders so wished to depart from? And what can this possible “return” to a new form of the “old times” mean for the future of Russia?

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