Traumas and memories are much discussed today. Historians argue about the ways of commemoration, and what they mean for the societies in question.¹ The recently established Legacy Foundation is dedicated to the commemoration in art and literature of violent traumas of the twentieth century. Its website, www.Legacy.org, contains a collection of paintings and texts that start with the Holocaust and travel through the less-remembered man-made disasters that affected societies and nations. The consensus seems to be that one can learn a great deal about a society from the ways in which it chooses to commemorate its defeats and victories.²

With the above in mind, I would like to outline the ways in which Russian social and political traumas have been remembered in written and spoken form in postcommunist Russia. I will argue that commemoration of these traumas has either contributed to the traditional Russian discourse of hostility and suspicion toward the Other (including the West), or it has begun to alleviate that hostility. My thesis is that the various events and undertakings commemorating Russia’s past have sometimes reconfirmed and at other times called into question the traditional Russian self-conceptualisation (sometimes called the master narrative, or the foundational myth, or the constitutive political myth). A reconfirmation of this master narrative drags Russia back toward the policies of the past and it is dangerous to Russia’s neighbours. Such a reconfirmation might be advantageous for the Russian state (it might help Russia return to the status of a great world power), but only at the expense of Russia’s citizens. Fortunately, Russians today are beginning to make a distinction between the state and themselves, and certain forms of commemoration in which they engage reconfirm Russian identity without re-enacting the traditional posture of an innocent victim bent on avenging the wrongs of the past.

Postcommunist Russia has generated two kinds of discourse about the history of the Russian Federation. The first is represented by the organisation called Memorial in Russian, by a tiny political party headed by Valeria Novodvorskaia that calls itself the Democratic Union (Demokraticheskii Soiuz), by small periodicals such as Novaja Gazeta and Novoe Vremia, and by such writers as Liudmila Petrushevskaja whose writings have begun to generate a new kind of communal memory.

The other discourse is represented by the recently-launched government campaign to promote pro-Russian attitudes in the Russian Federation and abroad; it is also represented by the majority of the intellectual and political establishment. The cultural campaign launched by President Vladimir Putin in March 2001 is scheduled to last five years, and it is targeting schools and the military.³ Its declared goal is to counter the ‘distortions’ and ‘falsifications’ of Russian history allegedly undertaken by recent revisionists. At the extreme margin of this discourse stands an organisation called Pamiat’: Narodno-Patrioticheskii Front (Memory: National and Patriotic Front). Pamiat’ dedicates itself to the restoration of autocracy and the assignment of blame for Russia’s troubles to non-Russians (mostly Jews, but also Chechens,
Poles, and others). Pamiat' has issued a manifesto titled 'Either us or them,' and this title is symptomatic of the kind of discourse in which it engages.

Memorial is a loose association of groups and individuals founded in 1988 and initially dedicated to the commemoration of Gulag victims. It calls itself "a historical and educational society," and it was the first nonpolitical social organisation to arise in the postcommunist period in Russia. Its first president was Andrei Sakharov. Pamiat' traces its roots to the Union of the Russian People, a markedly chauvinist organisation created in 1905. It is headed by Dmitrii Vasil'ev.

Memorial is sponsored financially by the Soros Foundation and by other American, German, Swiss, Dutch and Polish foundations. Pamiat' was founded in 1972–73 under the auspices of the Ministry of Aviation. The Union of the Russian People (a predecessor of Pamiat') was sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior. The present sources of sponsorship of Pamiat' remain obscure, but presumably they include some Russian businesses.

While Memorial was formed to commemorate Stalinist terror, it began to fulfill other tasks as time went on. Its members organise meetings and press conferences, write letters and reports on past and present human tragedies that took place within the borders of the former communist bloc. Memorial envisages building a museum, an archive, and a library in Moscow housing the artefacts of 'the time of the Gulag'. On the other hand, the government-sponsored cultural offensive envisages the creation of clubs and learning centres where children, officers and soldiers would regain their readiness to defend and protect their fatherland (rodina) in accordance with the Russian military tradition. The government also envisages a modification of the already-existing media into producers of "programs, shows, films and books that further patriotic education ... [that would favour] positive heroes finding resonance among diverse social groups". Prizes are envisaged for journalists, writers and filmmakers prepared to adopt these guidelines. Russian history textbooks published in the 1990s already follow these guidelines. Such efforts confirm the hegemony of the master narrative of Russian history which consists of the invocation of Russia's glory and power, its peculiar relationship to the West, its victimisation by the hostile Others of both Western and non-Western provenience, and acceptance of the sacred duty of Russia's citizens to defend the "places of memory," or localities considered crucial to Russia's master narrative—which implies the entire Russian state including its non-Russian areas. Any notion of a revision of these categories of the master narrative is reduced, in the textbooks and in government pronouncements, to the notion of a manipulation of memory, and it is interpreted as a plunder of Russia's history.

In other words, while Memorial tries to provide factual data that might eventually enable historians to agree on what happened and perhaps modify Russia's master narrative, the government campaign, standard Russian history textbooks, and Pamiat' shun the factual approach and instead use current events to reconfirm the categories of Russian discourse that have been in existence for centuries. A programmatic article by Vasil'ev begins with an invocation of the Kremlin, "that bastion of Russian glory and bravery ... whose walls narrate to us the tragic [my italics] history of Russia." All too often, it is within the parameters of such categories that history is remembered in Russia in the early twenty-first century.

These two kinds of discourse rely on the perceived actuality of Russia's imperial status. Unlike the other former inhabitants of the communist bloc, the Russians have both a national and an imperial identity. Sovietologist Uri Ra'anan said that "As the Staatsvolk (the
nationality that dominates the state) of the USSR, Russians in general tend to identify not only with the RSFSR, but with the USSR as a whole ... Because of this factor, Russian nationalism—which borders on chauvinism in many cases—tends to be antidemocratic, since it denies the right of other nationalities to self-determination."12 In non-Russian republics and regions, Russians are often perceived as historically complicit in the traumas imposed by communism on non-Russians. This perception is vigorously contested by virtually all Russians, yet it makes the work of organisations such as Memorial subject to pressure from both sides. Memorial holds that Russians carry a social responsibility (sotsial'naia otvetstvennost') for what happened in their empire. This is not tantamount to guilt (vina), but it nevertheless puts a unique burden on the shoulders of the present generation. No such burden is accepted by the official historiography or by academic circles. The idea that ordinary citizens bear civic responsibility for crimes committed by a government that was not imposed on Russia by a foreign military power is new to Russian discourse. The idea is deeply distressing to ordinary Russians who consider themselves innocent of the construction of the Gulag and of the Hitler-Stalin collaboration in 1939–1941. The absolute novelty of the Memorial approach cannot be overemphasised.

The history of Memorial is unusual in the Russian context. In 1987, various informal groups of intellectuals and of former inmates of Soviet concentration camps began to collect signatures under a statement proclaiming the need to commemorate victims of the Gulag. At that time, the only way to obtain funds for such an enterprise was to address the government. The organisers hoped to obtain funds for the publication of Gulag documents and for symbolic compensation to the Gulag victims. 50,000 signatures were collected. In 1988, the group succeeded in wrenching out of Mikhail Gorbachev a promise that a commemoration of Stalinist atrocities would take place. Such Soviet-era dissidents as Evgenia Ginzburg, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Varlaam Shalamov and Roy Medvedev were members of Memorial.13

As time went on, Memorial members began to ask themselves whether involving the government in such commemorative ventures was appropriate. In Russia, the line of succession between the old Stalinist regime and the new perestroika regime remains unbroken, and the people in power progressed through Stalinist ranks as they advanced in their careers and eventually acquired government jobs in postcommunist Russia. No Soviet-era dissident has ever gained a ministerial position in the Russian cabinet. The members of Memorial asked, "Would not such a commemoration risk becoming yet another falsification, as it would be orchestrated by the state that lied to its citizens for so long? Would not a monument sponsored by such a state have on its plinth, 'To the faithful sons of the Fatherland who perished during the period of socialist illegality'? Would not such a monument exclude the millions of peasants sentenced to death for being enemies of the state, would it not exclude the victims of Red Terror during the October Revolution or those thousands of people who 'thought differently' under Brezhnev and Khrushchev?" Owing to such considerations, the members of Memorial decided that government funding was not an option for their organisation.14

This was a remarkable position considering the traditional Russian political culture. For the first time in Russian history, a non-governmental group undertook the task of reassessing the historical memory of the nation. Instead of glorifying the dead and retelling Russia's foundational narrative, Memorial decided to shun state-oriented symbolism. Instead of calling the past "a period of mistakes and wrong solutions" as the government under Gorbachev was saying, they urged their fellow citizens to take historical responsibility for the crimes
committed by the state against its own citizens. *Memorial* members collected documents, organised lectures, published books, participated in the making of films. They set up a publishing house *Zven'ia*. They published a biographical dictionary of NKVD leaders between 1934–1941. They sponsored a historical essay contest in high schools. They set up 30 October as the day of commemoration of the victims of the state. That day was not meant to be a state holiday, like 1 May, but rather “the day of commemoration of the victims of political repression in Russia and in the former Soviet sphere of influence, particularly in the Soviet Union”. These are admirable attempts to acknowledge the presence of Others in Russian imperial history.

In 1992, the civil rights spokesperson Sergei Kovalev was elected President of *Memorial*. However, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, *Memorial*’s influence began to wane. Present-day membership is a far cry from the initial 50,000 signatures collected in 1987. *Memorial* lost its branches in the provinces and in many former Soviet republics, now sovereign states. Kovalev himself became deeply unpopular because of his stance concerning Chechnya: he continues to oppose the Russian army’s incursions into that republic. Between 1999–2001, 50 percent of *Memorial*’s activity has been devoted to Chechnya. *Memorial*’s position on that extremely cruel colonial war is deeply unpopular in today’s Russia. The admission of moral responsibility for the crimes committed in the name of the Russian state against non-Russians defies the most fundamental myth of Russian society, one that proclaims Russian innocence and its victimisation by Chechens and other alien forces. The events of 11 September, 2001, contributed a great deal to a sense of Russian self-righteousness with regard to the war in Chechnya.

In some of its attempts to undermine the national myths, *Memorial* encountered insurmountable obstacles. I have in mind the two conflicting narratives about the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33, one Russian, and the other, Ukrainian. While the Russians, including *Memorial*, speak of the millions of peasants killed by Stalin, the Ukrainians point to evidence indicating that communist Russia sealed the borders of Ukraine in 1932, preventing Ukrainians from escaping to Russia, Poland or Romania, and vice versa: preventing Russians from travelling to Ukraine and bringing bread or grain. Historian Robert Conquest stated that the goal was to weaken or destroy national identity in Ukraine where a perception of separate nationhood was rapidly growing. Restrictions concerning the importation of grain were accompanied by severe punishments for disobeying. At the height of the Famine, in the Kharkiv oblast alone, the Kharkiv court issued 1,500 death sentences in the period of one month. Conquest’s estimate of Famine deaths is 20 percent of the rural population, or five million people.

The Ukrainian historical narrative sees these events as an attempt to destroy or weaken Ukrainian nationhood. But the Russian historical narrative does not register these nationalistic complaints. There has been a distinct tendency in Russian historiography to conceal the fact that Ukrainians qua Ukrainians were targeted. Even *Memorial* shuns assigning the adjective ‘Ukrainian’ to the Famine, and it tends to subsume its victims in the general pool of victims of Soviet repression. During the ceremony commemorating the victims on 30 October 1999, *Memorial* in conjunction with government representatives invoked those Soviet citizens who were “killed for political reasons” rather than admitting that nationalistic hatred played a role in the policies devised for implementation in the non-Russian republics.

Accordingly, the commemorations of the Famine differ in Russia and Ukraine. In 1993, the Ukrainian government initiated a tradition of celebrating the Famine’s anniversary. The
Ukrainian communities abroad joined in, and now every Fall, from September to November, the period of mourning is marked by religious services, lectures, and publications. In Chicago, there exists a Committee to Remember the Famine. Each September, it sponsors commemorative celebrations. During these celebrations, the Famine’s victims are identified as “Ukraine’s small farmers”. This annual reminder and re dedication to the memory of those who died in 1932–33 is structured along the lines worked out by memorialisation of the Holocaust. It begins with identification of victims, identification of perpetrators (much less developed in the Ukrainian community than in the case of the Holocaust); honouring the survivors; honouring the dead; invocation of the deity within the religious tradition followed by the majority of the dead; and re dedication of the living to keeping the memory alive. In 1999, a solemn Requiem Mass in observance of the Great Famine was said at St Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. Both Catholic and Orthodox Ukrainian bishops participated, and so did the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America.22

No such commemoration has been undertaken in the Russian Federation, indeed an awareness of Moscow’s role in engineering the famine in Ukraine is largely missing. A Ukrainian-American scholar Roman Szporluk noted in a recent book that at Russian universities there is not a single department of Ukrainian Studies; an awareness of Ukrainian national identity seems not to have gained admission into the Russian collective memory.23 Here again we encounter the aspect of Russian national narrative that prevents proper commemoration of past disasters: the perceived innocence of Russians vis-à-vis those conquered by the Russian military. In contrast, the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States use the memory of the Famine to strengthen their own foundational myth which consists largely of suffering and victimisation, with little attention paid to those whom the Ukrainians have victimised in their rage against the Others.

Another factor that limits Memorial’s effectiveness is the Russian government’s seemingly unlimited resourcefulness in dodging closure and initiating new traumas. In the 1990s, there took place the OMON attacks on the demonstrators in Vilnius, Lithuania and in Tbilisi, Georgia; the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh where thousands of Azeris were slaughtered, with arms provided by the Russians; and two wars in Chechnya, 1994–96 and 1999–present. Memorial responded by renaming itself Pravozashchitnyi tsentr Memorial—the Memorial Centre for Human Rights. The objective now is to defend human rights in the post-Gulag Russian society, and not just to commemorate Gulag victims.

On 3 September 1999, Memorial issued a report titled ‘Ethniciskaia diskriminatsiia v Moskve’24 about the treatment of dark-skinned people on Moscow streets where they appear as refugees, seasonal workers or small traders. The paper is both descriptive and prescriptive, ie, it invokes international agreements on human rights (to which Moscow ostensibly subscribes) and also Russian laws that contradict Russia’s international agreements. The report points out that obtaining a permit to reside in Moscow is so complicated that refugees in particular are excluded from ever getting such a permit, and thus they risk going to jail every time they are stopped by the police—which happens often because of their skin colour. Furthermore, many refugees from Chechnya suffered a loss of internal passports during the war, and they could not obtain substitute passports without the old passports. Without a passport, it is impossible to find a legal job. Police searches in apartments occupied by dark-skinned Azeris, Chechens, and Tadjiks are routine; they are accompanied by beatings. Stopping people in the street is also routine; the report says that Moscow’s mayor, Iurii Luzhkov, himself ordered the police to detain ‘foreign-looking’ individuals. Beatings, deportations, arrests and confiscations of legal passports are also common.25 The Tadjik
Embassy in Moscow has reported that every month, the Embassy has been receiving several corpses of Tadjiks who died in Moscow's jails; the Embassy is supposed to ship them back to Tadjikistan at its own expense. According to Tadjik sources, there were 3,400 Tadjiks in Moscow jails in March 2001.

The Memorial report is written in a discursive mode. It avoids assigning the blame and concentrates instead on sketching out the dimensions of the disasters it documents. It represents Memorial at its best—as a rationalising agent providing data and a passionless description of what happened. It might seem that in that capacity, Memorial plays the same role as the Western NGOs that investigate past wrongdoings in their own countries. However, there is one important difference. Memorial's data has to do with the wrongdoings that are still taking place. Polls indicate that most Russians have great difficulties acknowledging past imperialism of the Russian state, and they are even less willing to see the Chechen war as an act of imperialism and wrongdoing. Therefore, Memorial is not a popular organisation in today's Russia.

Without a revision of collective memory with regard to the Other, it is impossible to affect a change. However, Russian collective memory, as represented by mainstream politicians, journalists, and writers, is not accepting any new materials concerning the Other. It contains however vast archives of the wrongdoings of Tadjiks, Chechens, Azeris and other newcomers from the depth of the empire, and as long as Tadjikistan, Chechnya or Nagorno-Karabakh remain on the edge of war, little can be added to these archives, and even less taken away. The hostile and dark-skinned Others are perceived by peaceful Muscovites as taking away their living space, their food, their cleanliness—their place under the sun. To delegitimise such archives and partially to replace them by the archives supplied by Memorial requires a sense of closure which the state has refused to provide.

The most tragic aspect of Memorial's activity has to do with the war in Chechnya. Russian national memory has preserved the image of the Chechens as hostile Others (they were called "the evil Chechens" by the Russian Romantic poet Mikhail Lermontov). During the two Chechen wars in the 1990s, an estimated 200,000 Chechens have died, and four times as many lost their homes and livelihoods. In 1991, the population of Chechnya stood at 1.3 million; by 2000, it reportedly had shrunk to 574,000.26

Memorial has organised exhibits and issued statements trying to dislodge the entrenched stereotypes about the Caucasian dwellers and raise public consciousness about the war's brutalities. On 5 March, 2001 in Moscow, Memorial representative Aleksandr Sokolov displayed photographs that showed the bodies of the tortured Chechens buried in an unmarked grave in a suburb of Groznyi. The photographs showed faces with skin peeled off, teeth pulled out, ears cut off etc. Many were blindfolded and had hands tied behind their backs.27 Memorial issued appeals to the Council of Europe and to the Russian authorities about the necessity of investigation, and it asked for a responsible memorialisation of the Chechen war. But the war—now on the wane, for the Chechens have almost been annihilated physically—continues to add to the arsenal of prejudicial memories and inflamed passions. What is occurring is what Hayden White has called "the mythication of the news": the news from Chechnya is instantly merged with the traditional image of the Chechens as criminals who deserve extermination. The bombings of the apartment blocks in Moscow and Volgodonsk in 1999 were instantly ascribed to Chechens by the police, and this opinion prevails today even though no internationally accepted proof has been presented and there has been no open trial.28
How hard it is for the Russians to modify the national narrative about the Chechens is exemplified by a recent initiative of the liberal weekly *Novaia Gazeta*. Novaia Gazeta sponsors a publication titled *A Book of Memory* (*Kniga pamiati*) about the second Chechen war. The *Book* contains the names of those who perished in the war. The chronicling of names began on 24 January 2000. So far, almost 2,000 names have been collected from various sources including the Russian provincial press and television and the Society of Soldiers' Mothers (*Obshchestvo soldatskikh materi*). The subtitle of the *Book of Memory*, however, says, “To the Memory of Those Who Perished in the Course of the Anti-Terrorist Operation on the Territory of the Province of Dagestan and the Province of Chechnya in 1999–2000.”30 In other words, an assessment and condemnation of the other side is soldered into the commemoration.

In 1997, Valeriuia Novodvorskaia, head of the tiny Democratic Union Party, remarked that while Americans have commemorated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Russians have not commemorated any of the disasters they imposed on other nations. “If Americans dropped the bombs on Moscow ... instead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they probably would have committed a collective suicide as an act of contrition and commemoration,” she wrote.31 This may be an exaggeration, but it pinpoints the problem of Russian unwillingness to modify their historical narrative and make adjustments to it in such a way as to incorporate the narratives of Others. Russian discourse seems to be radically resistant to such a process.32 So far, Russian collective memory has not been seriously challenged.

At a recent international academic conference dedicated to myth and memory, a Russian scholar began his paper by invoking two alternative ways of archiving memory that have existed in Russia since so-called Westerners proposed to modernise Russia in the nineteenth century: modernisation versus slipping back to old ways. By slipping back, the author meant a return to the vision of the past that consisted only of positive interpretations of it. And then he offered the following correction: “the unfortunate history of Russia, full of tragic experiences and horrible human loss, was somehow transformed [by the recent government-initiated festivities] into an uninterrupted Golden Age”.33 The paper thus slips into the ‘victimisation’ mode and continues in this fashion: it goes on to say that the end of communism left Russia without a national anthem, with borders it never had, without “traditional continuity” and without a universally accepted national holiday; all of these were tragedies that had to be foregrounded.34 Thus the only updating of the Russian historical narrative that the author proposes is an addition of the worn-out cliché about Russia’s victimisation. Such a correction does not modernise Russian discourse; on the contrary, it reconfirms the intransigence of Russian myths. The author’s quarrel with the official government-sanctioned historiography does not really question the traditional national narrative, it merely completes it by reminding Western audiences of those elements of the narrative that the government neglected to emphasise. By emplotting Russian history in such a way as to exclude the Other from it, the author continues to mythologise that history while ostensibly going beyond earlier interpretations. By peopling Russian imperial history exclusively with Russians and by marginalising other inhabitants of the empire—by refusing to accept the Other’s point of view—the author helps to re-legitimise the narrative of Russian history that has been carried on uninterruptedly from Nikolai Karamzin in the nineteenth century to Nicholas Riasanovsky in the twentieth.

Some Russian fiction writers have attempted to undermine the national myth not by arguing against it directly but by showing its incommensurability with the lives of ordinary Russians. Foremost among such writers is Liudmila Petrushevskaya. Her *opus* consists of
hundreds of short stories, plays, and novellas that show a lack of participation of Russian women in the Russian national myth. The Russian women of Petrushevskaya's stories have no consciousness of being part of an imperial nation, and they draw no benefits from their nation's imperial status. The opposite happens: Pania (in 'Bednoe serdtse Pani' ['Pania's Poor Heart']) is forced to travel to the far north, having just given birth to a baby whom she intended to abort and whose subsequent fate does not interest her; while Lena (in 'Skripka' ['The Violin']) has no place to give birth to her baby. The vastness of the empire contrasts with the ridiculous smallness of these women's living quarters and with the absence of opportunities for them and for their babies. Multiply such reminders of incommensurability by the hundreds, and you might come to the conclusion, as I have, that Petrushevskaya is consciously deconstructing the Russian imperial myth in the name of a better future for Russian women.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that there are two ways of storing traumatic collective memories. One is instant mythification of events and their incorporation into the existing categories of national mythology. The other is the collection of data about disasters and, on that basis, re-arrangement or even de-legitimisation of some elements of the traditional national narrative.

The discourse generated by Memorial in Russia amounts to collecting data and making it known, withholding judgment but foregrounding the collected materials. These materials might lead to judgment, but only after a sense of closure has been confirmed and reconfirmed. The discourse of Demokratischii Soiuz and of imaginative writers like Petrushevskaya tends to be more flamboyant, and it defiantly eyes de-legitimisation of Russian collective memory. This de-legitimisation cannot occur, however, before the 'rationalising' process is completed. Therefore, Memorial's work is in a sense more important, for it places the traumas of the past in the discursive register, speaking about their dimensions rather than evaluating them. However, Memorial's work is limited by the small size of the organisation, by deep entrenchment of the traditional narrative in Russian society and by such political realities as the ongoing war in Chechnya.

Organisations such as Pamiat', which memorialise by demonising the Other, enjoy considerable social support. The rhetorical strategies used by Pamiat' and by some government circles consign Russia's disasters to external enemies or to the demonic forces that ruled Russia under communism. These disasters thus become part of the conventional plot of Russian history that alternates between victimisation and glorious victory. The massive infusion of government funds and access to government-controlled media and publishing houses ensure wide acceptance of this traditional way of seeing Russian history. With few exceptions, Russian collective memory has absorbed events of the recent past in such a way as to add to that already existing archive rather than calling it into question. While Memorial has made a step toward a revision of Russia's memories, most Russian historians cling to unexamined myths and continue to archive history in such a way as to exclude the narrative of the Others from it. A sense of closure has not been achieved. Russians still see themselves in terms of 'us' and 'them,' and they see the world as engaged in a zero-sum game.

Thus in my opinion, the ways in which Russians narrate and commemorate past traumas remain largely unchanged in spite of the changes in the political and economic system. The constitutive political myth of Russia as embedded, for instance, in Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace (glory plus victimisation) has not been dislodged; on the contrary, it is being reaffirmed
and revived through campaigns in the educational system and in the military. The deep wounds in Russian memory are being reopened by Others who absurdly (in the opinion of Russians) claim to be the victims of Russia, and not just the victims of Stalinism. This gives rise to powerful Russian aversions, and it reinforces the intransigence with which Russians view their history and memory. The rapidity with which the USSR disintegrated and economic ruin of the post-Soviet lands was disclosed caused bewilderment and a tendency to look for culprits among the non-Russians. In Russia, memories are still grievances calling for action against the Other, rather than being signals to commemorate the events of the past.

The absence of memorial responses to Russia’s colonial conquests, the responses that exist in America with regard to the American Indians, bodes ill for Russia’s integration into Europe. Russian collective memory is still at the stage of denial and trauma: it has memorialised Russian suffering but not that of nations harmed by Russia. In Russia, there are no equivalents to the memorialisation in America of the Trail of Tears (the forcible relocation of Indians to Oklahoma). Russia is still at an elementary stage of memory-building. Russian culture is a culture of traumas and not a culture of memory.

It appears that the sense of closure and the ensuing change in discourse can only be achieved when wars are over and when contentiousness abates. At present, Russia is a ‘tense’ (as opposed to a ‘relaxed’) society, a society that is nervous about the war in the Caucasus, and this prevents Memorial from making an impact.37 The accepted narrative of Russian history incorporates a conviction that Russia is a great and glorious nation deserving of a privileged space in the international community; and that it has been victimised by alien forces such as Mongols, communists, Nazis, Jews, Americans, Chechens, Poles, and others. While the efforts of Memorial continue to provide sobering factual data, its intervention is barely making a ripple, and no correction to the narrative about Russia’s past is yet possible.

Notes

3 Agence France-Presse (Moscow), 15 March 2001. So far, the government dedicated six million dollars to the promotion of what it calls “a rebirth of the Russian people’s authentic spiritual values”.
4 ‘Kto My,’ an article explaining the genesis of Memorial at the organisation’s web site, <http://www.memo.ru>.
5 http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/studies2.html.
6 The Pamiat website is http://www.pamyat.org/. The information and quotes come from this website.
8 See endnote 1.
9 More on that subject in Ewa M Thompson, Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism, Westport, CT, Greenwood, 2000, 185–193.
13 Of these, only Solzhenitsyn remains alive today.
15 Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del. The volume was published on 28 January 2000.
16 The branch in Ukraine, however, remains active, as shown in David Pultz’s Eternal Memory: Voices from the Great Terror (1997), a film documenting Soviet terror in Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s.
18 Robert Conquest’s testimony in David Pultz’s Eternal Memory.
19 Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow, 226.
20 Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow, 249.
22 Ukrainian Weekly, vol 67, No 42 (17 October, 1999).
25 <http://www.memo.ru/hr/discrim/ethnic/moscow01.htm> Memorial paper posted on 3 September 1999.
27 AFP, 5 March 2001.
28 Ewa M Thompson, ‘The Real Story Behind Putin’s Rise’, Houston Chronicle, 9 April 2000. In 2002, the Putin government declared that the guilty have been found and sentenced, but no details of the trial have been released.
29 Novaia Gazeta began publication in 1993.
34 Ibid.
35 Ewa M Thompson, Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism, 199–221.

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